THE INDYPENDENT

DREAMS OF MY RADICAL NUYORICAN MOTHER — P18

#276: DEC 2022/JAN 2023

LAURA JANE BRETT

LABOR BATTLES

NYC WAREHOUSE WORKERS, BARISTAS, DELIVERISTAS, ADJUNCT PROFESSORS AND MORE ARE FIGHTING FOR DIGNITY AND A BETTER LIFE

P4 • P10–17

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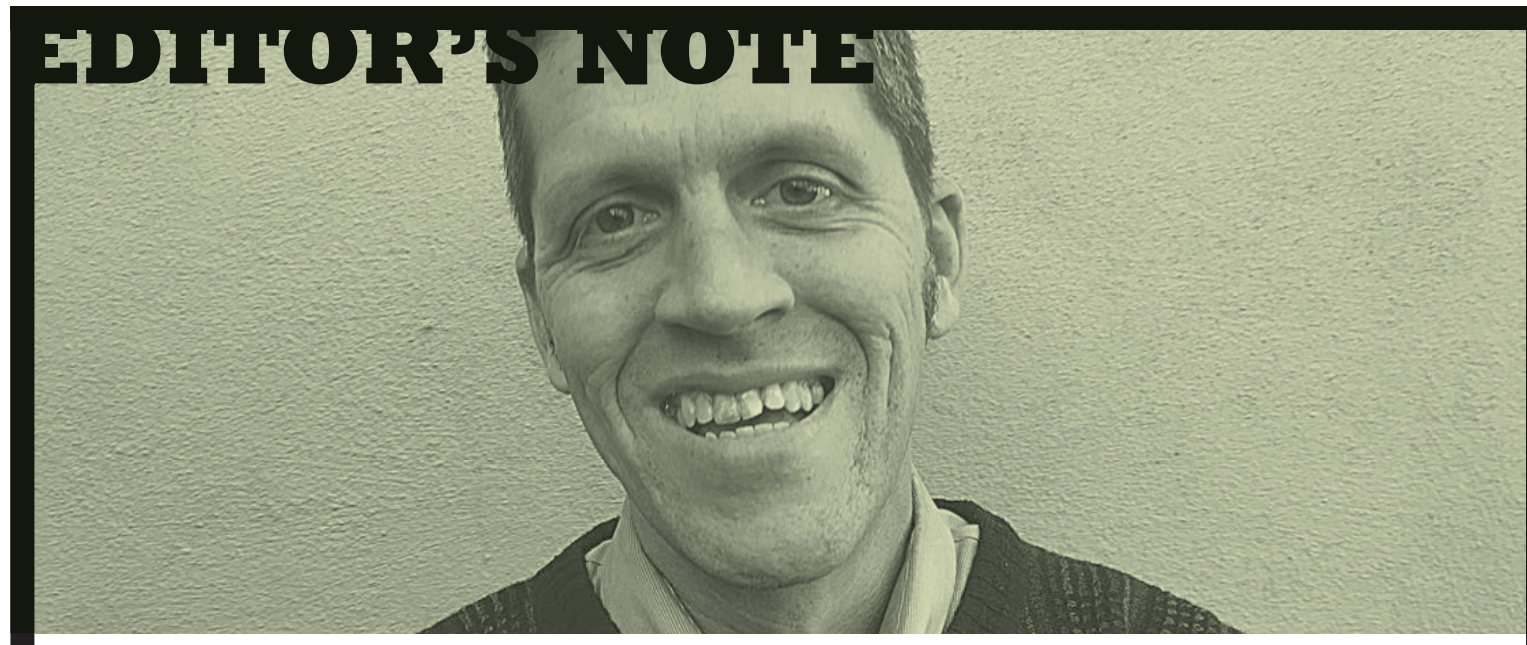

ALINA MOGILYANSKAYA

ELON MUSK WILL NEVER OWN THE INDY

BUT READER SUPPORT REMAINS ESSENTIAL TO THE SURVIVAL OF THIS NEWSPAPER

In late October, the world's richest man, Elon Musk, purchased the world's "town square," for $44 billion. Twitter's total number of users (235 million) is dwarfed by Facebook (1.98 billion) and the company loses money almost every year. Yet, it has an outsized influence on the media and public discourse. So Musk snapped it up.

With his new toy in hand, Musk promptly fired half of Twitter's 7,500 employees. Content moderation has been largely dismantled. And Twitter is once again awash in neo-Nazis and other far-right trolls and conspiracy theorists who Musk encourages at every turn.

Will the manic maneuverings of Twitter's new owner cause the company to implode? Will Musk, the son of a South African diamond magnate, whose business empire includes Tesla Motors and Space-X, tumble from the sky like a modern-day Icarus? Signs so far are encouraging. Corporate advertisers are fleeing Twitter. The value of Tesla's stock has halved this year amid Musk's dalliance with social media. On December 12, Forbes announced that Musk — whose net worth has declined to a mere $167 billion — had been dethroned as the world's wealthiest person by French industrialist Bernard Arnault.

• • •

Left unasked is why should one person have so much power? *What would a civic-minded Internet run as a public utility freed from the whims of billionaires and the relentless logic of capitalist profit-seeking look like? Hopefully, we will find out some day. In the meantime, we should defend and support the public commons that we still do have, including* The Indypendent.

Here at The Indy, *we don't work for distant corporate shareholders or to get rich. Our mission is to report on and amplify the voices of progressive and radical social movements here in New York City and beyond, providing incisive coverage you won't find anywhere else.*

Running on a shoestring budget, our small paid staff and dozens of volunteers do the herculean task of bringing you this free newspaper and circulating it across the city each month. We also update the indypendent.org website with breaking news between print editions, host a weekly radio show on WBAI-99.5 FM that airs Tuesdays at 5 p.m., publish a weekly e-newsletter that you can sign up for at bit.ly/3HG0wzQ and are active on social media.

In the past year we have provided extensive coverage of the upsurge in labor organizing and strikes (with more in this issue!). We have also chronicled the abuses and excesses of Mayor Eric Adams, continued to report on the struggle between NYC's machine Democrats and progressive and socialist reformers, closely followed tenant movements around the city, including new organizing endeavors among homeless New Yorkers, and covered the loss of the historic queer "People's Beach" at Jacob Riis Park, just to cite a few highlights from our coverage.

In this huge city, it's easy for us as individuals or groups to feel isolated. The Indy *helps us see our connectedness, see ourselves as something more than the sum of our parts, as a movement of movements.*

• • •

This couldn't be more urgent. *Corporate media can't bring itself to say it. But we live in a moment of rising fascism. Elon Musk's hostile Twitter takeover is just froth atop the wave. LGBTQ people and their safe spaces are attacked. In wide swaths of the country, abortion clinics are being closed, pregnant people and their helpers surveilled and criminalized across state lines. School boards and libraries are being bullied; teachers risk losing their jobs for conveying an honest version of this country's history. Local election officials are besieged with death threats. Killer cops are once again beyond reproach. Turns out the same far-right forces that have whined for years about "cancel culture" can't get enough of it.*

The goal of this violent minority is to gradually push all of us who don't share their vision for society to the margins of public life and to foreclose the possibility of changing an already unacceptable status quo.

The only thing that can cancel The Indy *is a lack of funds, which is always a possibility. We almost went under during the pandemic but pulled through thanks to reader support. But scraping by can't be the norm. This is why we have set our highest-ever goal for our winter fund drive: $50,000. With your backing, we can do even more great work in 2023, without the stress of wondering if our next month will be our last.*

If you have given before, we welcome your continued support. If you enjoy reading The Indy *but have not given before, this is a great time to strengthen a people's institution. Whether you can make a holiday gift of $27, $50, $100, $200, $500, $1,000 or more, it all makes a difference.*

For more about our winter fund drive and how you can help, please visit Pages 22-23. And don't miss the article on Page 10 by our fall intern Katie Pruden. One of America's most inspiring new 21st century unions is now publishing its own newspaper.

Onward,

John Tarleton

JOHN TARLETON
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

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IN THIS ISSUE

COLLECTIVE ACTION WINS, P4
Part-time faculty at The New School went on strike for 24 days and won important gains.

HOUSE RULES, P6
Hakeem Jeffries' Wall Street ties have helped fuel his rise to be the top Democrat in the House.

PRICE-GOUGED, P7
Con Ed is seeking another round of double-digit rate hikes.

COLORADO SPRINGS REACTION, P8
"If I'm going to go down, it better be in a place that has love in it," a cocktail waitress told The Indy.

HOMOPHOBIA, P9
The far right is stoking hatred of the LGBTQ community. Will it work?

HOT OFF THE PRESSES, P10
The Amazon Labor Union's new newspaper is witty and to-the-point.

WORKER SELF-DEFENSE, P11
The "Delivery Boys" have organized a self-defense network to combat a surge in e-bike thefts.

DOUBLE THE TROUBLE, P12
Baristas at the Starbucks-Amazon Go store at Times Square are taking on two of the largest union busters.

LABOR BRIEFS, P14
Municipal retirees win court battle, NLRB takes action, labor rumblings at Montefiore Hospital, NJ farmworker card check.

AUTOMATE THIS, P15
Artificial intelligence will replace 45 million jobs this decade. Then what?

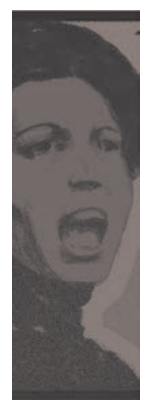
BOSSES BROUGHT TO HEEL, P17
How airline stewardesses fought sexism and unionized their profession.

DREAMS OF MY NUYORICAN MOTHER, P18
Nicholas Powers looks back on how the 1960s transformed his mother's life.

WORLD CUP CAPTURE, P20
This year's World Cup in Qatar is not the first time the event has been co-opted by autocrats.

REVEREND BILLY'S REVELATIONS, P21
Reverend Billy remembers two friends who left inspiring legacies of art and activism.

AN ACT OF CREATION, P22
The left has to fund its own institutions, or they won't exist.



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BROOKLYN FOR PEACE

LAURA JANE BRETT

PICKET LINE: *New School part-time faculty and their supporters held daily pickets to highlight their struggle.*

COLLECTIVE ACTION GETS THE GOODS

NEW SCHOOL ADJUNCT PROFESSORS CLAIM VICTORY AFTER 24-DAY STRIKE

By Indypendent Staff

After striking for nearly a month, part-time faculty at The New School reached a tentative contract agreement with management on Dec. 10. The deal would give the adjunct professors their first pay raise in four years. It would also provide better health-care coverage and pay them for the first time for work done outside the classroom such as advising students.

"This time last year, I was researching the growing labor movement for my master's thesis at Parsons. Yesterday, my New School faculty colleagues and I became part of labor history," tweeted Molly Regan, one of the strike leaders.

The union's bargaining committee unanimously recommended approval of the package. As *The Indypendent* went to press, union members were reviewing the terms of the settlement before voting on it.

The strike shook The New School, which has long been associated with progressive ideals. It was founded in 1919 by prominent intellectuals including professors who were forced out of Columbia University for opposing U.S. entry into World War I. The New School later became a magnet for Jewish academics fleeing Nazi Germany and has maintained a progressive reputation since.

These days, poorly paid adjuncts make up 87% of the teaching faculty at The New School. When their strike began on Nov. 16, classes ground to a halt. Once underway, the strike brought daily picket lines to the main campus building just southwest of Union Square in Lower Manhattan. The picketing part-time professors found enthusiastic support from New School students who saw the strikers' cause as their own.

"I would happily give up finishing my MFA if it meant better opportunities for writers to come as a result of this strike," said Allegra Rosenbaum, a first-year graduate student.

The strikers also received picket-line support from other unions including Amazon Labor Union, Starbucks Workers United and their academic union brethren at NYU and Columbia.

Shortly before the strike ended, the parents of New School students threatened to file a lawsuit against the university while students took over part of the University Center and staged a round-the-clock occupation.

"It was the perfect storm of a lot of factors," said Lee-Sean Huang, a part-time assistant professor at Parsons School of Design, New School since 2016 and a member of the ACT-UAW 7902 bargaining committee.

For many students, witnessing a strike for the first time was a revelation.

Radha, a third-year student at Lang College of Liberal Arts, echoed an Instagram comment by her mother that "The New School may have unintentionally radicalized and created an entire university's student body that will always support unions."

The student occupation of the University Center that began in the final days of the strike continued after classes resumed. The part-time faculty's strike victory has inspired some students and faculty to call for a thorough restructuring of The New School and how it is run.

SOLIDARITY FROM STUDENTS, PARENTS AND OTHER UNIONS BOOSTED THE STRIKERS' CAUSE.

On Dec. 12, the One New School Coalition of students and faculty issued a statement of no-confidence in the New School's top executives and the Board of Trustees and called on them to resign.

"We demand full financial transparency and the activation of a full participatory process for the administration of the school, including the budget," the group said in a statement it released.

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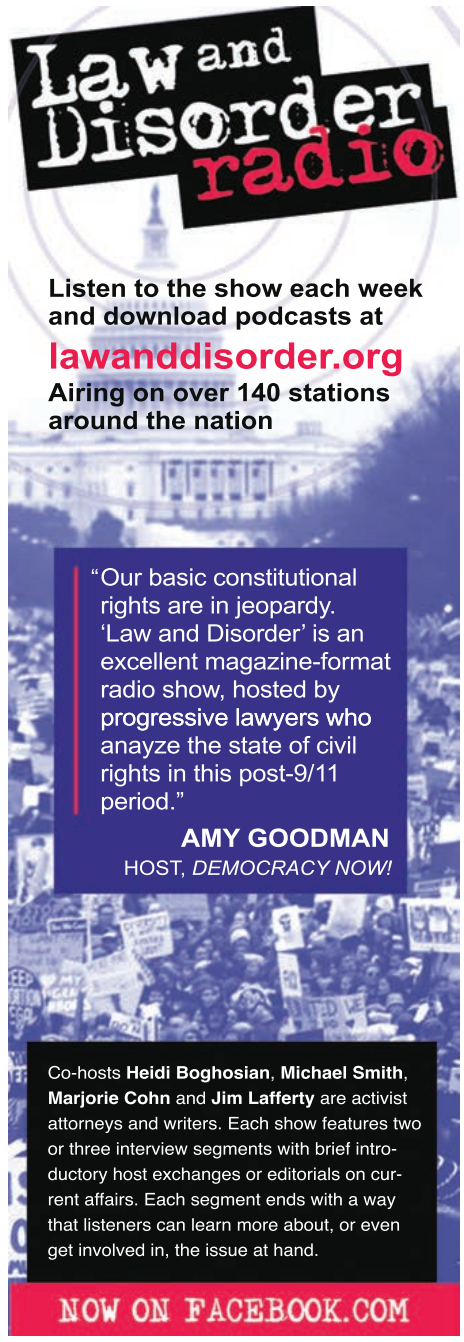
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MEET THE NEW BOSS, SAME AS...

BROOKLYN'S HAKEEM JEFFRIES BECOMES THE HOUSE'S NEW TOP DEM

By Theodore Hamm

NEXT GENERATION: *Hakeem Jeffries, 52, is now the top Democrat in the House of Representatives and first in line to be speaker of the House if the Democrats regain a majority in 2024.*

OLD GUARD: *Nancy Pelosi, 82, tapped Hakeem Jeffries to be her successor after leading House Democrats since 2004 including stints as Speaker from 2006–2010 and 2018–2022.*

Hakeem Jeffries' ascent to succeed Nancy Pelosi as leader of the House Democrats provoked a wave of media commentary about Brooklyn's prominence on the national political stage. Jeffries and Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer now can share a park bench near Grand Army Plaza and plot strategy.

It is not exactly clear how the masses of Brooklyn or the rest of New York City might benefit from the duo's influence. But the high-rollers on Wall Street are no doubt thrilled to have two of their closest allies in power.

Jeffries, a former corporate lawyer, has rarely fought for the issues that animate the Democrats' activist base. Meanwhile, leading Wall Street players stridently oppose single-payer health care, champion their own versions of a Green New Deal,and bear overwhelming responsibility for the student debt crisis.

Even though Democrats are the minority party in the House, progressives want Jeffries to push their issues. "We want to have hearings on Medicare for All [and] free public college," Bay Area Congressman Ro Khanna recently told *Axios*.

Jeffries' money trail nonetheless suggests that Wall Street will continue to have his ear.

First elected to his Central Brooklyn/southwest Queens seat in 2012, Jeffries became the party's Caucus Chair after the 2018 midterms. Rumors began to swirl that he would succeed Pelosi. After he raised between $1.1 million and $1.74 million in his first four campaigns, Jeffries' coffers began to fill up for the 2020 cycle.

Although he did not face a serious challenger in either of his last two elections, Jeffries' filings — as tracked by OpenSecrets.org — show that he hauled in over $4.1 million in 2020 and $5.8 million this year. (His 2022 opponent raised $20,000.) Pelosi averaged $24 million in the last two cycles, suggesting that Jeffries may need to hire more bookkeepers.

In his last two campaigns, Jeffries collected roughly $850,000 from Wall Street hedge fund, private equity and real estate interests. These investors often make overlapping investments, as evidenced by Blackstone Group, a private equity firm that is also a giant landlord. Blackstone deposited nearly $33,000 in Jeffries' 2022 campaign coffers.

Jeffries' intake from Wall Street currently pales in comparison to Schumer, whose close ties to the financial sector date back to the late 1970s. Because a Senate seat is a six-year cycle, the totals regularly exceed House campaigns. Jeffries, however, appears likely to catch up to Schumer in his next few House reelection bids.

In his 2022 campaign, Schumer collected $41.1 million, despite running against an unknown opponent. Over 10% of his total haul came from Wall Street interests. The Blackstone Group kicked in nearly $275,000. Schumer also tallied six-figure donations from tech companies (including Google and Microsoft) and the private health-care industry.

In his most recent term, Schumer tacked left, sensing a groundswell of activist support for a potential challenge from Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez. The Senate majority leader's outspoken support for the Biden administration's student-loan reduction plan may make it seem like he is in sync with the activist base. Biden's debt relief initiative, however, is a far cry from Bernie Sanders' 2020 campaign proposal to fund free public college by taxing Wall Street stock, bonds and derivative trading.

Unlike Schumer, Jeffries at least claims to support Medicare for All. Although in 2019 the now-minority leader signed on as a cosponsor of single-payer legislation, Beltway insiders do not view Jeffries as a "major champion." As *The Intercept* recently reported, the Brooklyn power broker is also not particularly interested in the Green New Deal.

JEFFRIES AND SENATE MAJORITY LEADER CHUCK SCHUMER CAN NOW SHARE A PARK BENCH NEAR GRAND ARMY PLAZA AND PLOT STRATEGY.

Among other advantages, being the head of the minority party in either chamber allows leaders to defer action until they become majority leader. For at least the next two years, Jeffries will thus try to steer activists' demands into the future. It is up to the base to decide how to apply pressure. In the meantime, Jeffries will be amassing a war chest that will make it very difficult for him to be dislodged.

KARA MCCURDY

CON JOB: *A speaker at a Nov. 21 public hearing demonstrates how Con Edison is price gouging its customers.*

KARA MCCURDY

SPEAKING OUT: *Assemblymember Zohran Mamdani took the lead in organizing a Nov. 21 "people's hearing" in Astoria.*

ABUSE OF POWER

ASTORIA RESIDENTS DEMAND ROLL BACK OF CON ED'S NEW ROUND OF PROPOSED RATE HIKES

By Jenna Gaudino

Con Edison, the privately owned, publicly-regulated monopoly that provides electricity to New York City and Westchester County, is seeking permission to raise its rates by 11.2% for electricity and 18.2% for gas. If the increases are approved by the New York State Public Service Commission (PSC), the average residential customer's electric bill would go up by about $21 per month, and their gas bill by $38, beginning in 2023.

The proposed increases would affect Con Ed's approximately 3.3 million electricity customers and 1.1 million gas customers. The PSC grants increases after a period of public comment. It held three online public hearings in March, and has received more than 4,500 written comments.

The PSC and Gov. Kathy Hochul did not respond to a letter requesting another public hearing, sent in September by Assemblymember Zohran Mamdani (D-Queens), state Sen. Michael Gianaris (D-Queens) and more than a dozen other state legislators. The legislators assert that most New Yorkers don't know about the potential rate hikes or how they're determined.

Spurred by the lack of communication, Mamdani, with the assistance of Gianaris and others, hosted a "People's Hearing" on the evening of Nov. 21, in Astoria, Queens. The hearing gave consumers the opportunity to express their hardships and frustrations, which were recorded and submitted as official public statements to the PSC and the governor.

"How dare Con Edison tell us that they will not talk to us about the rate increase of 10%!" Roseann McSorley, owner of the Katch Astoria gastropub, said at the hearing. "Who the hell do they think they are to hand us a bill for 10% more? This community has lost a third of our small businesses during COVID! A third! We're all families trying to support our community. They come to our restaurants, our salons, our liquor stores. They enjoy the benefits of living in an Astoria that will not exist anymore. We cannot pay a 10% increase! We cannot!"

Con Ed argues that the increases are mostly due to increases in the market cost of fuel. "The supply cost has shot way up. It has to do with demand. It has to do with the supply," Jamie McShane, the company's director of media relations, said in a September press release. He said the war in Ukraine is pushing up oil prices as well, and "we buy it at the wholesale market, and we basically charge customers what we pay for it without a profit."

The company also says that it will have to pay $2.5 billion in property taxes in 2023, and about $180 million of the increase in electric costs and $75 million of the increase for gas would go to cover that.

The rate increases will land on New Yorkers who are already having trouble paying their gas and electric bills. According to an analysis of data from January 2022 by *The City*, more than 400,000 residential Con Ed customers were 60 or more days behind on bill payments.

"I was getting off the bus and I saw this lady, this elderly woman, and she had two bags with her and she was struggling with them," said Eric Thor, an Astoria resident, at the People's Hearing. "I lifted up the bags and they were really, really, heavy.

It was all potatoes in there. So I walked with her to her apartment and I said, 'Why didn't you go to the grocery store that's one block away?' And she said, 'The potatoes there are too expensive.' So a 60 dollar raise would be debilitating."

Sen. Gianaris argues that Con Ed could afford to lower rates even with the recent increases in the cost of fuel. It faces little competition, given its monopoly, and has $14 billion in annual revenues.

"We may defeat one rate hike, but then another will come in three years," Assemblymember Mamdani said. "So what we are fighting for, through legislation, through organizing, is a different way of distributing energy. … That is something called public power. Con Ed is a private company and a private company will always want more profit. It's our job, as the public, to ask, 'Is this the only way we can do this?' And we know that it's not."

The New York Power Authority (NYPA), run by the state, is one possible alternative. It currently finances construction of power projects through bond sales to private investors and repays bondholders with proceeds from their operations, without using any tax revenue or state debt. The power from those projects is delivered through a grid that Con Ed operates, however.

Public power could also help the state convert its energy system to renewable sources. More than 70% of the electricity NYPA produces is from hydropower.

The Build Public Renewables Act, introduced in the Legislature in 2021, would allow NYPA to build renewable energy projects itself and sell electricity directly to consumers. It would also require the NYPA to provide only renewable energy by 2030 and make it the sole power provider for state-owned and municipal properties by 2035.

The Senate passed it by a 38-25 vote last June, but it did not receive a committee hearing in the Assembly.

Con Ed boasts it has reduced carbon emissions from its facilities and operations by more than half since 2005, and pledges it will reach zero emissions by 2040.

However, the utility company does not actually own many of the plants that provide its electricity. State regulations in the late 1990s required the company to divest from its power plants in the city, such as the 2,480-megawatt Ravenswood complex in Queens that provides about one-fifth of the city's electricity, mostly from burning natural gas.

The Ravenswood plants current owner is committed to making the transition to clean energy, its CEO told the *Queens Post* in February, but "it will take a lot of work over a number of years."

BLAKE MCMILLAN

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‘YOU HAVE TO LIVE YOUR LIFE’

QUEER & TRANS NYCERS RESPOND TO COLORADO SPRINGS MASS SHOOTING

By Blake McMillan

In the wake of the Nov. 26 mass shooting at Club Q in Colorado Springs, *The Indypendent* spoke with people in the LGBTQ community at different locations throughout the West Village, predominantly “safe” queer spaces. They shared how they are processing their fears and what should be done to address the increasing hate and violence directed at queer people.

Light edits for length and clarity have been made.

SITANYA FACE

Alexander Scelso is a drag queen performing at the Stonewall Inn in the West Village under the name Sitanya Face.

“There’s a lot of tension, and sometimes it just seeps into just everyday life, mundane life. I think when that kind of stuff is taught, and that kind of stuff is seen as an example, people that have that negative belief system of queer people, it can even just affect how people view you on the train. I’ve been taking cabs a lot more to my gigs just to avoid that kind of stuff to be safe. And it makes me fear for my queer family, just feeling that lack of safety.

“I feel like the fear was always there, to be honest. I think right now it’s being amplified. It’s just a matter of taking precautions in different ways, like going to places with friends, making sure you’re not totally alone. So, in a way, you always feel like you have your queer family with you.

In these spaces, you want to feel like you’re escaping from daily life where you don’t feel as loved or supported. These places are safe havens; I make people smile for my job as a drag queen. But I want to make it an escape for people, these queer bars. And I just hope that we’re able to really tough it out.”

KANGA ROO

Kanga Roo is a trans cocktail waitress at Playhouse in the West Village.

“It’s hard to navigate how you should feel about this because it’s really delicate. It’s been really tough. I mean, I definitely know the increase in security has already heightened anxiety for a lot of people. And I understand that. I’m just here for people. I just want to be an open energy for people. They need somebody to talk to about any difficult situation, especially this. This has been a huge, catastrophic event that’s happened.

“If I’m going to go down in someplace, that sure as hell better be a place that has love in it. In some ways, you just kind of have to live your life as if it were going to be your last day, and it’s better to do it with the people that you love a lot. I love this place and I’m going to be here as much as I can.”

What do you think should happen in response to this anti-queer backlash?

“Trying to listen to understand, instead of listening to respond. There’s a lot of response but it’s not the correct response, a lot of it coming from people who aren’t directly affected. You need to sit back and listen to what’s going on. You know, unfortunately, that’s really all you can do. There’s nothing that will make a person change more than just listening to understand.”

ASHER

Asher is a nonbinary person who has frequented the LGBT Center in the West Village since they were 16.* The Indy *encountered them seated at the entrance of the center.

“The people doing the stuff, when you look at them, are all white supremacists. As a Black person, these people are always kind of on my radar as dangerous people. As a queer person, I just always knew the hate and the capacity for this kind of violence existed.

“I’m 22. The Pulse nightclub shooting happened in 2016 in the summer, I think. And I first started coming to the center in October of 2016. I remember talking to my school social worker, who’s a trans man and just being like, ‘I’m scared to go,’ even though I’d always wanted to. Like, I was scared to come here; I just didn’t feel safe. A queer space that’s labeled a queer space, everyone can see that in the first place.

“I thought that I had gotten over that kind of paranoia until the Colorado Springs shooting happened. And I realized, I’m still scared. But I’m not reacting the same way because I’m able to sit in the space.

“I don’t feel more fearful than I did before. But the fear is at the forefront of my mind now. I think the Pulse nightclub shooter really was the one that put that fear there. And I’ve just been managing that fear all these years.

“I’m for gun control. But I think America is weird because the government and the politicians — it feels like they’re saying, ‘Let’s not offend like the Second Amendment people.’ I don’t understand why they hold so much loyalty to these old documents and shit like that. I don’t understand. If it’s an amendment, you can amend it. We can change it. People will still find a way to keep guns, but a lot of these shooters, they attain them legally.”

DEBBIE YORIZZO

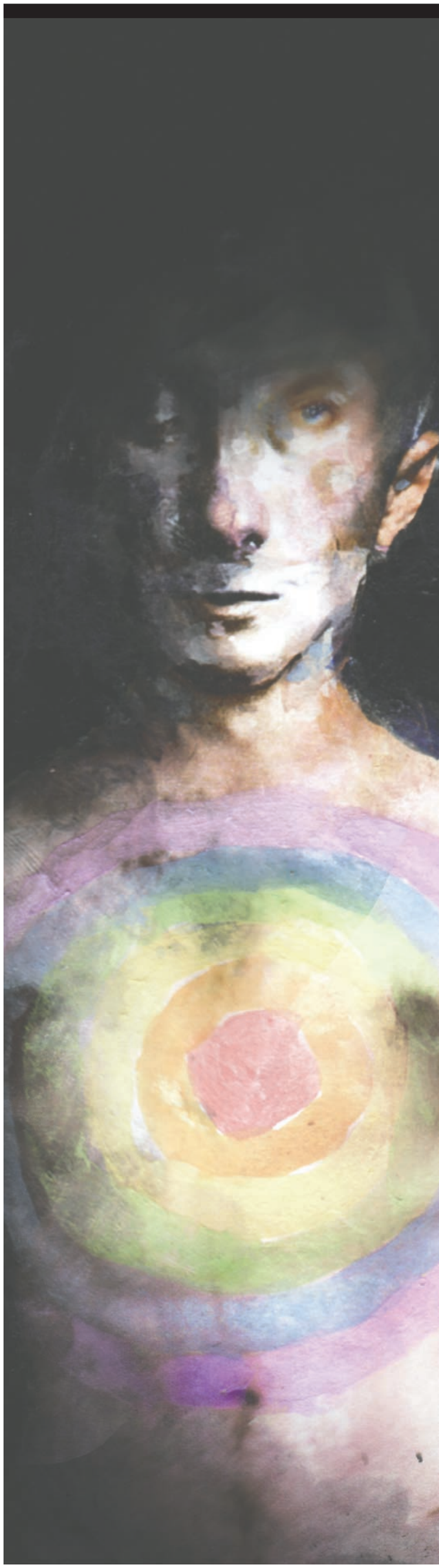
Debbie Yorizzo is a lesbian who visits the LGBT Center. She works at a coffee shop and is applying to become a school teacher.

“It’s painful, and it’s based on people’s inability to see that diversity actually is powerful.

“I live in Staten Island and I’m an out lesbian. There are some pockets of progressive liberal people, but there’s also pockets of Republicans who are not willing to hear us, so I think it’s about our voices being heard.

“I’m so anti-guns. It’s ridiculous. … You see a kindergarten kid with crayons of blood. And back to the shooting in Colorado, this is not how I want to live a life where we go look at the autopsies and say, ‘That’s perhaps how we could change the gun laws.’

“We have to keep fighting. There was a recent Nobel Peace Prize winner who went with peace activists in Ukraine. And she said that they’ve got to fight. ‘You got to fight these people that are trying to invade your country.’ And I feel like as a queer person it’s about love. You’re trying to invade my heart. And it’s not going to happen.”



DAVID HOLLENBACH

WHY THE HATERS HATE

THE ATTACKS WON'T STOP WITH LGBTQ PEOPLE

By Nicholas Powers

Was that music? The pop, pop, pop. Perplexed, partiers at Club Q turned and saw 22-year-old Anderson Lee Aldrich firing an AR-15-style rifle into the dancefloor. Panicked, they stampeded. Five were hit and killed. Twenty-five were injured.

Iraq War veteran Richard Ferrio and two others including a trans woman tackled Aldrich, grabbed the gun and beat the killer raw. They saved lives. Yet the truth is Aldrich is not the first, nor the last hetero-terrorist, in this case a straight man who claims to be nonbinary, using violence to terrorize LGBTQ people.

Increasingly, right-wing media portray them as a threat to kids. Using homophobic tropes of gays "grooming" youth in order to molest them, reactionaries channel populist anxiety over cultural change or economic inequality into sexual and gender fundamentalism. They have framed homosexuality as perversion and promote patriarchy, mostly Christian nationalism, as the cure. The result is the normalization of violence that spills over into a wider swath of American life. Here is the bloodbath of hetero-terrorism.

LIFE ON THE EDGE

Every. Single. Day. Queer people are killed, beaten, fired, insulted, raped and threatened. Many victims don't feel safe reporting crimes to the police. Will they be believed? Will they be laughed at or dismissed? A few do and those numbers, scanty and sporadic, paint a horrifying picture.

Death by machine gun under a strobe light is a dramatic display of homophobia. It is also the tip of an iceberg of violence. Jo Yurcaba reported in NBC News that, "… hate crime incidents based on anti-LGBTQ bias were down overall, from 1,393 in 2019 to 1,287 in 2020," but that attacks on trans and non-conforming people "jumped by nearly 20% for the second year in a row." The Human Rights Campaign took the grim toll of 57 trans men and women, killed in 2021. Before that, the National Coalition of Anti-Violence Programs tallied roughly 2,000 hate crimes a year against LGTBQ people in the United States alone from 2011 to 2013. It's about five attacks a day. The hardest hit were people of color, transgender women and, tragically, the point where targets of hate overlap, transgender women of color, who were killed most and often brutally.

Add to that many gay, transgender and gender nonbinary people don't report violence. Experience taught them they will not be helped or believed. Or if they "come out" to report a crime, it can cost them their job and housing, due to a lack of legal protection against anti-LGBTQ discrimination in many states. The statistical portrait of homophobic violence is incomplete, with as many as twice the number of victims, if not more, staying silent. So while the FBI reports roughly 7,500 hate crimes annually, the U.S. Census conducts a National Crime Victimization Survey and pegs that number at roughly 200,000 hate crimes in the U.S. annually.

Added to the physical violence the LGTBQ community faces are new laws pushed by Republicans to recloset them. Since 2018, conservative state legislators across the country have filed at least 670 anti-LGBTQ bills, 238 just in 2022. In an NBC News report, Matt Lavietes and Elliot Ramos wrote the measures, "would restrict LGBTQ issues in school curriculums, permit religious exemptions to discriminate against LGBTQ people and limit trans people's ability to play sports, use bathrooms that correspond with their gender identity and receive gender-affirming health care." Knowing laws are turned against them like knives causes higher rates of depression and suicide among trans youth.

Pull the lens back and one sees not just in Red-State America but whole swaths of the world in which LGBTQ are in danger. In Saudi Arabia, homosexuality is punishable by death. In Iran, homosexuality is punishable by death. In Jamaica, mobs, whipped into a frenzy by fanatical Christians, chase and kill LGBTQ youth. In Sudan, homosexuality is punishable by death. In Zimbabwe, the president has publicly threatened to behead gays. In Russia, anti-LGBTQ laws are written and violence stoked by politicians.

PEDOPHILE PARANOIA

How is this justified? How is the immense violence poured upon a sexual minority excused in the eyes of their murderers? When they look in the mirror, they don't see killers but heroes who are defending the even more helpless — children.

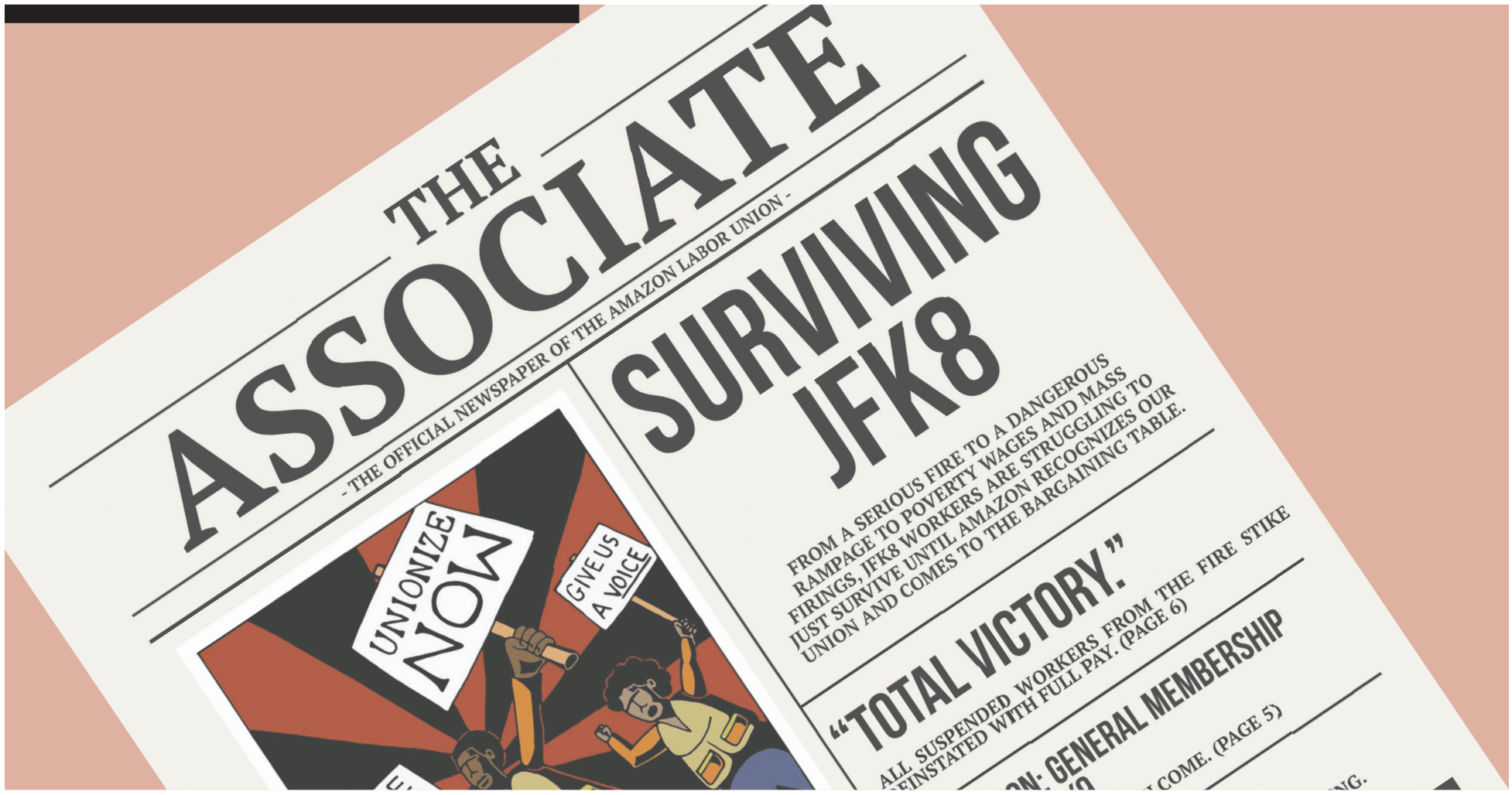
The most damaging homophobic stereotype is that LGBTQ people "groom" children in order to turn them gay or fuck them. It serves a specific role in the conservative worldview. It inverts their position as members of the dominant racial group, the dominant gender, the dominant class whose privileged position was built on centuries of violence. In short, history's villain is transformed into its hero because now they rescue babies. The psychological need to be innocent killers is so great that QAnon followers hallucinate that the Democratic Party is a Satan-worshipping cabal, selling children for sex. It led one man to storm a pizzeria in Washington, D.C., to free kids being trafficked there. He found nothing but four years in prison.

The right-wing accusation that Democrats and LGBTQ people are pedophiles has gone from the fringe to mainstream. At first it was QAnon followers. Next, Republican senators used it to question Judge Ketanji Brown Jackson during her Supreme Court nomination hearings on why she was "lenient" on pedophiles. Jonathan Chait wrote in *New York Magazine* that Republican obsession with alleged Democratic pedophilia "says nothing about the parties' comparative permissiveness about sexual assault. It reveals the existence within one of them of an openness to conspiracy theories and a network of operatives unprincipled enough to exploit it." It also reveals the fragile insecurity at the heart of modern conservatism that instead of facing reality, they retreat into a paranoid fantasy in which they are the "good guys with guns."

After Aldrich stormed Club Q and fired an assault rifle into the crowd, killing, injuring and terrifying the people in it, conservatives again justified it as a retaliation for grooming kids. Three examples come to mind. Tucker Carlson at first condemned the shooting but then showed a graphic that said, "STOP SEXUALIZING KIDS." On a subsequent show, his guest threatened more mass killings, "until we end this evil agenda that is attacking children." Far-right pundit Tim Poole tweeted, "Club Q had a grooming event. How do we prevent the violence and stop the grooming?" Matt Walsh, a YouTuber with almost two million followers said, "Is it that hard to not cross-front of kids? Is the compulsion that overwhelming?" he asked in the video. "If it's causing this much chaos and violence, why do you insist on continuing to do it?"

Take a wild guess what happened. In December, 50 far-right protesters, some armed with guns; showed up at a Holi-Drag Storytime in Ohio, which was then canceled. Armed rightwing bullies have intimidated drag

Continued on page 16


THE ASSOCIATE
- THE OFFICIAL NEWSPAPER OF THE AMAZON LABOR UNION -
SURVIVING JFK8
FROM A SERIOUS FIRE TO A DANGEROUS RAMPAGE TO POVERTY WAGES AND MASS FIRINGS, JFK8 WORKERS ARE STRUGGLING TO JUST SURVIVE UNTIL AMAZON RECOGNIZES OUR UNION AND COMES TO THE BARGAINING TABLE.
"TOTAL VICTORY."
ALL SUSPENDED WORKERS FROM THE FIRE STIKE REINSTATED WITH FULL PAY. (PAGE 6)
GENERAL MEMBERSHIP
COME. (PAGE 5)
UNIONIZE NOW
GIVE US A VOICE

EXTRA! EXTRA! READ ALL ABOUT IT!

AMAZON LABOR UNION NEWSPAPER REVIVES INDEPENDENT LABOR PRESS

By Katie Pruden

"Surviving JFK8" screams one headline, in bold black letters.

Other, smaller ones read, "Bezos Cuts 10K Jobs to Send Bae to Space?" and "Attention: General Membership Meeting 12/9." On Page 2, the Editorial Board authors "Can't Survive on $18.75! Why Amazon's 'Raise' is Actually a Pay Cut for JFK8 Workers."

Witty and to-the-point. This is *The Associate*, the official newspaper of the independent, worker-led Amazon Labor Union (ALU) at the JFK8 warehouse in Staten Island, the only U.S. Amazon warehouse where workers have won union representation.

ALU members Cassio Mendoza, Ebrima Baldeh and Brima Sylla started publishing the newspaper in July. Previously, ALU worker-organizers circulated union information by posting flyers in break rooms, but felt the need to discuss worker-related issues more in depth, more permanently — to deliver something people could pick up at work and take home.

"JFK8 is like a rumor mill," Mendoza, co-editor of *The Associate*, says of the mega warehouse where more than 6,000 people are employed. Mendoza says rumors there are often started by management, like a broken game of telephone. Creating a newspaper was a way to counter that.

"Whenever something good happens to the union, you'll hear whispers about some crazy shit, and then you have to dispel it," Mendoza said. He recalled that workers came to a union meeting panicked after Amazon suspended around 80 out of 650 employees that took part in a wildcat sit-in in response to an Oct. 3 warehouse fire. Managers had said that those suspended would be fired. However, within a week, all of them except for three lead union organizers were back to work. How did the union respond? In The Associate's most recent issue carried a story from Mendoza titled "All Hell Broke Loose: Inside the Fire Strike."

When co-workers approach the union with grievances or questions, Mendoza said, "We don't say 'This is definitely going to happen,' we just tell them factual information about what's legal and what's not legal, and in what ways we can fight back."

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In June, Mendoza, Baldeh and Sylla began meeting regularly to plan the launch of the union newspaper. They wanted to be sure that co-workers would read it, and that it would have a positive impact. They knew that newspapers have historically played an important role in successful organizing.

The soon-to-be editors studied influential movement papers, such as *The Black Panther*, the official newspaper of the Black Panther Party, the most widely-read Black newspaper from 1968 to 1971, according to the San Francisco Bay View. They also decided to take a page out of the New York Post's handbook — draw in readers with hilarious or outrageous headlines.

In July, the first issue of *The Associate* was published, three months after the warehouse voted to unionize. The headline read, "After The Election, What's Next?: The [first issue] will focus on the next steps for the workers of JFK8 after we defeated Amazon on April 1st, 2022, by over 500 votes." A small group of workers were involved in writing Issue 1.

Funded by the union but edited autonomously, *The Associate* is published bi-monthly with a press run of 4,000. It is printed by TriStar Offset Printing, a unionized print shop in Queens, and dropped off in bound stacks of 100 at the ALU headquarters near JFK8 in northwestern Staten Island.

Over the course of a week, editors and other ALU distribute the newspapers at the bus stop in front of JFK8, at the entrance to the warehouse, in the breakroom and within their respective departments in non-work areas. There is a network of people who distribute the copies in most shifts and departments, and the ALU hopes to soon ensure the entire facility is covered.

The paper is print only — there is no online version. Delivering the news in print invites readers to carefully peruse it, the editors say, and builds trust and credibility: The distribution process gives union members a chance to interact with co-workers they haven't met before.

"I see people pick up the newspaper and read it," co-editor Ebrima Baldeh told The Indypendent. "They are going to spread the word that the articles are interesting. It's not about gossip, it's about what is happening in the building," he said.

Workers write articles that include a mix of political education, union information, broader labor movement news and news from within JFK8. The ALU funds the paper but its editorial board operates independently from the union's executive board.

In addition to informing workers about what's going on in the warehouse, the newspaper is aimed at bolstering support for the union and connection between union and non-union members — it is an organizing tool.

Although JFK8 workers voted to be represented by the ALU, that is not the last step in the process of official unionization. The ALU won't be certified (meaning it wont represent all workers in the warehouse, collect dues or hold a union election) until a first contract is negotiated between the union and the employer. This process is arduous and lengthy, particularly when dealing with an employer as powerful and staunchly anti-union as Amazon.

"The slow pace of the certification process is frustrating," said Baldeh. "Changes are not sudden and the transition is not something that can take place immediately, so, the newspaper has been spreading the word for us."

THE ASSOCIATE IS READ BY WORKERS AT THE MASSIVE JFK8 WAREHOUSE

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Labor historian Toni Gilpin believes a print union paper is "one of the most important tools in a union's toolbox."

"When the labor movement has been the most powerful, it's had all these kinds of channels of communication between workers," Gilpin told *The Indy*. "Labor had their own radio stations, their own newspapers, and working people had alternatives to the reactionary press that they were subjected to regularly," she said.

Starting in the late 19th Century, labor press began to flour-

Continued on page 16

DASHIELL ALLEN

COMMUNITY: *The Delivery Boys recently celebrated two years of keeping each other safe.*

WHEEL HANDLE THAT

COMMUNITY: NYC'S "DELIVERY BOYS" BAND TOGETHER TO PROTECT THEMSELVES FROM E-BIKE THEFT, TRAFFIC ACCIDENTS

By Dashiell Allen

The constant thefts of their electric bikes have led New York City's food delivery workers to organize themselves over the past two years, using Facebook and WhatsApp to create a citywide support network and community watch group.

Their community activism is partially based on traditional Indigenous Mexican forms of organization.

On a cold, rainy November night on Manhattan's Upper West Side, Juan Solano rides his electric bicycle through the city streets. Soaking wet with water in his boots, he still manages to keep a smile on his face as he battles the natural elements.

He knows by heart the addresses of all the buildings in the neighborhood, some of the largest of which have separate entrances for workers. He's one of the approximately 60,000 food delivery workers who keep New York City afloat, working for apps like Grubhub, Doordash and Relay.

Juan has been a delivery worker for the past four years, since arriving in the United States from his hometown, San Juan Puerto Montaña, in Guerrero, Mexico. Since then he's seen his fair share of incidents, including two traffic accidents and a robbery last year.

According to *The New York Times*, electric bicycle thefts increased 98% between 2019 and 2020. The bikes, which delivery workers depend on, cost around $2,000 apiece, and are frequently sold on the black market.

The NYPD says they don't have data for the number of robberies this year, but a Facebook page, El Diario de los Delivery Boys en la Gran Manzana, created by Juan and his cousins Sergio and Cesar Solano, has documented at least 70 bike thefts in the past three months.

"When the pandemic started, people started robbing us with guns, with knives, or three people would take your bike," recalls Antony Chavez, another delivery worker.

The distances they needed to travel also became much longer, increasing the number of traffic accidents. The application Relay in particular, which Juan uses, is one of the few that pays an hourly wage of $12.50 — but in exchange, riders have to accept all the orders that come in, even if it's just a single slice of pizza delivered 50 blocks away.

And if there's an accident, "When you fall with a bicycle ... and you need to go to an ambulance, who will take care of your bicycle?" asked Juan. "The ambulance doesn't take the bike."

Juan and his cousins started their page in November 2020 to share information with their community. At that time, Juan remembers, delivery workers were barely organized, and most thefts occurred with impunity. Now, two years later, the page has more than 43,000 followers and conditions have improved, even as robberies continue on a daily basis.

They've now created a mutual support network using seven WhatsApp groups.

"They are communicating in real time, and if someone steals your bike [or is hit in a traffic accident], they immediately send an alert to the group and go [to the scene] and recover the bikes," explains Ambar Reyes, a researcher at MIT who has been studying the Delivery Boys. They use different means to catch thieves, such as installing hidden GPS devices on bikes or physically going to the location where the robbery occurred within minutes of it happening.

"We get at least three cases a day," said Juan.

In fact, during the Delivery Boy's own anniversary celebration, there was an accident just a few blocks away at 110th Street and First Avenue. "In five minutes, about 20 colleagues were gathered," Juan said proudly. "We were able to help faster than the police."

In particular, Juan says robberies used to occur daily along the Willis Avenue Bridge between the South Bronx and East Harlem. He and his cousins don't frequently cross it, since they live in East Harlem and most of their work is in Manhattan, but when they heard complaints from several of their compañeros, they knew it was time to organize.

Starting in June 2021, they launched a community watch group.

Said Juan, "we have urged everyone to cross in groups so as not to be assaulted, because the people who take our bicycles if they see you alone, they'll take [your bike], but if they see that there are five or six of you, they do nothing, because even they are afraid of us."

Despite holding protests and making demands to install security cameras and put more lighting on the bridge, they never received a clear response from the police.

In the absence of police support, "we help ourselves," Juan explains. "The people save the people."

At the entrance to the bridge at 125th St. and First Ave., a rotating group would stand guard from 8 p.m. until the early hours of the morning. If someone was robbed, they would immediately go to the middle of the bridge to help them.

Juan and his cousins come from the Tlapaneca Indigenous community, isolated from the mainstream culture in Mexico. Spanish is actually Juan's second language.

Their "forms of social organization in New York and in Mexico, are born from the same reason; which is a lack of help from the government when they need help," according to Reyes.

In addition to community watch groups, which are common in Guerrero and other states in Mexico, the Delivery Boys use Facebook live broadcasts as if it were a community radio station, a form of communication also common in Mexican rural and Indigenous communities, says Reyes.

The on-site watch ended about eight months ago when they saw the robberies decrease, but the space under the bridge remains a place of unity between the two counties for them; that's where they celebrated their anniversary, with a birthday cake, mariachi music and the raffle of a new electric bicycle.

The Delivery Boys, along with other groups, make up the NYC Food Delivery Movement.

Self-sustaining and without ties to NGOs or local politicians, "we are not an organization, we are just a movement and what we do is move around the city," explains Sergio Solano.

Conditions remain difficult. Founder of another Facebook page El Chapín en Dos Ruedas Antony Chavez, originally from Guatemala, lives in the Bronx but keeps his bike in a Manhattan parking lot for safety.

Rolando Reras, with four years delivering, now uses a shared bike from the city instead of his own; he's already had his own stolen and "I'm afraid it will be stolen again," he explains.

And many delivery workers have lost their lives. On Nov. 2, during Day of the Dead celebrations, the Delivery Boys created a traditional ofrenda under the Willis Avenue Bridge commemorating the (at least) 18 delivery boys who died during the past year.

One of them is Tiburcio Castillo, who died after being assaulted crossing the same bridge in June of this year.

Still, the workers are proud that in recent months they have been able to recover more of the stolen bicycles, thanks to the GPSs with which they can locate them.

"Right now I have about 10 GPSs to give away to my followers, to encourage them" to use them, said Chavez.

In fact, just last month the Delivery Boys recovered a stolen bike.

"Even though the compañero gave it up for lost, today thanks to the [GPS] it appeared in Manhattan," the page reads. "[After] an intense search the compañeros from the WhatsApp group were able to recover it."

THEIR FRUSTRATION IS BREWING

WORKERS AT DUAL STARBUCKS-AMAZON STORE TAKE ON TWO UNION-BUSTING GIANTS IN THEIR FIGHT FOR BETTER PAY, WORKING CONDITIONS

By Dylan Rice

At 9 a.m. on a dreary November morning, a line of customers stretched outside the door of the Starbucks in the base of the *New York Times* building across Eighth Avenue from the Port Authority Bus Terminal. A young woman working at the front of the store shouted over the crowd that those who ordered online must queue to the left. Patrons, mostly tourists milling around the Times Square area, expressed frustration at the long wait and odd nature of this Starbucks. It wasn't like the ones they'd been to before — it was also a workerless Amazon Go market.

Opened in July, it is one of only two "Starbucks Pick Up with Amazon Go" markets in the United States. The first one opened on the Upper East Side in November 2021. The project combines "the coffee chain's order-ahead feature with e-commerce firm's Just Walk Out cashierless technology," *PCMag* reported in July.

"Meet a completely different Starbucks built on effortless convenience," the store's opening announcement read. The baristas that staff the location beg to differ. They began organizing a campaign for representation by the Starbucks Workers United union in late August.

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The Starbucks-Amazon Go stores feel like an entryway into a dystopian world created by Amazon founder Jeff Bezos and Starbucks CEO Howard Schultz — one where human interaction is minimized and frictionless shopping is the ideal.

At the *Times* building location, shoppers can buy cafe-style snacks and pre-prepared meals at Amazon Go, which occupies half of the store. In order to enter this half, customers must insert a credit card into a waist-high, transparent electronic gate. Thermal cameras that dangle above sync the card with its owner, triggering the gates to open. Shoppers are charged if they leave with any items.

The dysfunction that plagues the location as a result of the contactless market is remedied with live, breathing workers that assist customers. The problem: They are hired and paid by Starbucks, and receive nothing from Amazon except an occasional unpaid training. Despite the additional job duties they must perform, the baristas enjoy no additional pay benefits. Their wages are the same as any Starbucks barista in the area, between $15.50 and $18 per hour.

"The biggest portion of stress comes from the fact that we're an Amazon Go store as well," worker-organizer Greyson Lee told *The Indypendent*. "It's two of the biggest corporate entities known for union-busting and capitalist nonsense coming together."

The joint venture has generated the same working conditions Starbucks baristas have denounced during a surge of unionization at the company beginning in late 2021: Erratic schedules, sporadic and targeted enforcement of company policies, low pay, and understaffing. Workers also complain that the presence of the Amazon Go means dealing with irate customers who are confused by the location's set up and glitchy technology.

"It sounds confusing because it is confusing. It makes no sense to the partners [Starbucks workers]; it makes no sense to the customers. It gets taken out on us," said Hal Battjes, another member of the union's organizing committee. "There are positions that were specially designed for these Amazon Go-Starbucks combos: Inventory support, hot foods, expiry, concierge."

More than 265 Starbucks have voted to unionize with the worker-led Starbucks Workers Union (SBWU) since December 2021, and at least 40 others are currently preparing for union elections. At Amazon, where the workplaces are much larger and management equally anti-union, only one shop has voted for a union so far: the JFK8 warehouse on Staten Island, where workers voted 2,654 to 2,131 for the independent, worker-formed Amazon Labor Union (ALU) in April. Organizing efforts have been launched in at least ten other states.

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The line of perturbed customers stretching out the door that early-November morning was mainly a result of the store's layout. Shoppers entering the Starbucks-Amazon Go are quickly forced to pack in tightly. The location was built under the theory that it would primarily serve customers who ordered in advance, like the *Times* workers who occupy the offices above. This has not been the case — one worker estimated that 60% of orders are made in-person and 40% online.

Workers told *The Indy* that during "peak time," from 8 a.m. to 10 a.m., they serve an average of six or seven customers per minute. Furthermore, baristas say customers harass them verbally, make racist remarks and even engage in physical confrontations. Management's usual response is to reprimand the workers for not providing the ideal "customer connection," they say.

One barista recounted a time when a customer, confused about the electronic gate, got in their face and berated them. After the incident, the worker was scolded by their manager for "not handling the situation correctly." Starbucks describes their workers' obligation to provide the ideal customer experience as "making the moment."

Another worker faced a customer who yelled, "I don't want that [n-word] making my coffee." A third barista described being physically assaulted while closing. She said she defended herself by raising her arms to the assailant's face, as the security guard on duty fled the scene. She was subsequently scolded by management for not "correctly de-escalating" the situation.

One of the main complaints workers organizing with SBWU are aiming to address is the lack of communication with Amazon. "The design team at Amazon talks to our district manager, our district manager then tells our managers, then our managers tell us what the deal is with the Amazon stuff," says Battjes. "The only time we've really had any direct contact with Amazon is every once and a while, they'll come in to do these specialized trainings. These trainings aren't compensated; our extra labor isn't receiving extra pay."

LAURA JANE BRETT

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LAURA JANE BRETT

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When Starbucks-Amazon Go opened, its stated intent was to bring together the "best of the best" Starbucks employees in the area. "We didn't sign any transfer papers that usually go along with changing stores and we were basically sent over [here] without really a choice at all," said Battjes, who worked with Geyson Lee at a Starbucks on West 46th St. before they were both transferred during the summer. The two had casually discussed unionizing at their previous location, and upon arrival to the new store, connected with Aaron, another member of the organizing committee.

"If I can take my position to make it better for partners at my individual store and simultaneously increase benefits for people all over the world, then I can go to sleep at night," Battjes said. They and many of their coworkers are young adults struggling to live on their own.

Battjes, Lee, Aaron and the other five members of the organizing committee do most of their organizing in the shop because of the busy schedules of everyone involved. The store is open from 6 a.m. to 10 p.m. and the workers are forced to put up with erratic schedules.

"You wake up at three in the morning to get to a shift and the next day you have to close," said Battjes. "How are you expected to have any semblance of a sleep schedule or normalcy?"

Although management doesn't like it, organizers spend non-work time in the break room, talking up the benefits of a union with coworkers who are undecided about how to vote. Worker-organizers delivered union cards signed by more than 70% of the 31 employees to the NLRB when they filed for an election. The lack of additional compensation for their additional duties is driving the support, organizers say.

On Nov. 17, this year's "Red Cup Day" — one of Starbucks' busiest days, when customers can purchase a reusable holiday cup that gets them 10 cents off each purchase — a total of 112 U.S. stores, including seven in New York City, staged one-day strikes. At least 20 workers from Starbucks-Amazon Go picketed outside it. They were unable to shut down the store, as managers and scabs filled in, but their continuous presence over nine hours drew the support of other unions as well as media coverage.

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The Indy sat down with worker-organizers on Nov. 4 during a day of action. They had set up an all-day tabling session in the Amazon Go cafe section of the store, where fellow Starbucks "partners" could come to learn about the union push. They had also called for workers to wear their SBWU shirts that day, in response to a crackdown from management, specifically against Battjes, for wearing union shirts. Workers said they were threatened with "no call, no shows" — missing a shift without calling in, a fireable offense — for wearing the shirts.

Aaron handed out SBWU shirts and buttons accompanied by a legal slip for any worker told to remove it by management to his co-workers.

Customers sitting near the union table largely ignored it, but the supervisors on duty hovered close by. Two Amazon representatives also made an appearance.

Throughout the day, workers finishing their shifts approached the table to greet one another and express their frustrations. The tone of their voices and the visible exhaustion on the faces of those completing the morning shift made it clear that frustration was brewing like hot coffee. They asked each other when their next shifts would be, and expressed a shared need for rest in anticipation of a similar day tomorrow.

Before beginning to work at Starbucks, one 18-year-old barista, Milli (a pseudonym) had been bed-ridden for five years due to lupus and rheumatoid arthritis. Sitting at the table, she said management had repeatedly complicated and delayed her attempts to receive accommodations for her disability.

When she was hired, Milli listed her availability as Monday through Saturday because she comes from a religious family and goes to church on Sunday with her mother. But when a supervisor asked if she would be able to work on a Sunday in case of an emergency, she said yes, feeling the pressure of being at the beginning of her probationary period. She was quickly scheduled to come in for the 5 a.m. opening nearly every Sunday morning. To arrive on time from her home in East New York, she has to wake up at 2 a.m. She claims that her request to work at least some midday shifts instead of solely mornings was rejected, leaving her having to wake up at 2 a.m. up to six days a week.

"I see at least two partners a day just spending their breaks wallowing in our small, back break room, just staring off into space," Milli said. "And you want to help them: 'Do you want water, did you eat today?' And they go, 'No, I used my markouts so I don't have any money to afford anything,' or, 'I can't walk anywhere because I only have a 10-minute break,' or 'I can't afford to eat anywhere else."

Another worker showed the listing for their position on Indeed.com, which reads as a standard listing for barista positions at any of the thousands of Starbucks locations across the country. It did not mention of the dual nature of the role or the extra functions workers are required to take on.

• • •

Starbucks profits briefly dipped in 2020 at the onset of the pandemic but have since resumed climbing. The company made $32.3 billion over the past year while carrying out a scorched-earth union-busting campaign that has resulted in the firing of more than 100 worker organizers across the country. Store managers frequently hold "captive-audience meetings" — labor-speak for when an employer forces workers to attend anti-union sessions during a union drive.

When asked what he would say to Starbucks CEO Howard Schultz, Lee offered, "No longer will we stand for being treated like dirt. No longer will we stand for you and your yacht while we can barely make rent."

Regardless of the difficulties faced day to day and management's refusal to accommodate her schedule, Milli was adamant that she had no plans to leave the fight for the union behind. "My parents are just telling me to quit but I can't quit, I'm too deep in," she said.

"Me, Greyson and Aaron have put too much effort into this to walk away," said Battjes, sharing the sentiment. "Without Starbucks, I don't know what I'd do. Right now, I can get by, and I don't have the mental strength to remove myself from this environment, because not only is it my livelihood but it's my social group; it's how I'm able to function and be an adult." But Battjes fears homelessness and wants to make a fair wage. Their $15.50 pay for a 30-35 hour work weeks puts them at the city's poverty line.

Just before The Indy *went to press on Dec. 15, the NLRB announced that the workers at Starbucks-Amazon Go had voted 14-13 against unionizing. The worker-organizers at the store say they will contest the election result, citing intimidation tactics used by management. "This isn't the end of the road for us, but another uphill battle," barista Hal Battjes said. "We aren't going to let them bog us down and silence us."*

ANOTHER CUP OF JOE: *A Starbucks barista hard at work.*

OFF THE CLOCK: *Pro-union baristas talk after they get off work.*

CONVENIENCE AT A COST: *Inside the Starbucks/Amazon Go store at 8th Ave. and 40th St.*

THE INDYPENDENT
LANDLORDS' NIGHTMARE P5 · MIGRANTS ARRIVE P14
#274: OCTOBER 2022
22 YEARS
2000
2022
BROKEN PROMISE
WILL CITY COUNCIL BACK THE MAYOR'S PLAN TO SHIFT 250,000 RETIRED CITY WORKERS TO A PRIVATIZED VERSION OF MEDICARE?
BY STEVE WISHNIA — P12
JALOPY THEATRE
@ St. Ann's Church
157 Montague St.

ON THE STORY: The Indy's *October cover story looked at the city's controversial plan to shift 250,000 municipal retirees to privately-run Medicare Advantage.*

NYC LABOR BRIEFS

BY INDYPENDENT STAFF

STATE COURT RULES IN FAVOR OF NYC MUNICIPAL RETIREES

A state appeals court on Nov. 22 unanimously upheld a March lower-court ruling that the City can't legally switch retired workers from traditional Medicare to a private Medicare Advantage plan or force them to pay more to stay on Medicare. It agreed that the switch violated Section 12-126 of the city administrative code, which requires the City to "pay the entire cost of health insurance coverage" for workers and retirees up to the legal limit. However, the Adams administration and several major unions, including District Council 37 and the United Federation of Teachers, are campaigning to change that section. They say the switch is necessary to achieve the $600 million in health-care savings they agreed to in 2018. "There are better ways to save money on health care" than "throwing taxpayers' money down the corrupt Medicare Advantage rabbit hole," Stuart Eber, president of the Council of Municipal Retiree Organizations of New York City, said after the decision.

NLRB SUES GREAT NECK STARBUCKS

The National Labor Relations Board's Brooklyn regional office filed suit against Starbucks in federal court Nov. 30, requesting that the court order the company to bargain with the Starbucks Workers United union at its Great Neck store and rehire a fired worker. The union filed for representation at the Long Island store in February, submitting cards signed by 15 workers, but lost the election by a 6-5 vote in May. The NLRB said there was credible evidence that the store and district managers had threatened that workers would lose benefits if they voted for the union, interrogated them about union activities and fired one union supporter in retaliation. The suit argues that those violations were so "serious and substantial" that there was a minimal chance the board could conduct a fair rerun election. It is the fifth injunction the NLRB has sought against Starbucks since the organizing campaign began last year.

MONTEFIORE INTERNS & RESIDENTS LAUNCH UNION

Interns and residents at Montefiore Medical Center in the Bronx announced Nov. 1 that they want to join the Committee of Interns and Residents, a Service Employees International Union affiliate that represents "house staff" doctors, who typically work 60 to 80 hours a week. The union said about 70% of the 1,200 house-staff doctors at Montefiore had signed union cards. The hospital refused to recognize the union through card check, which means the union will have to file for an election with the National Labor Relations Board. That refusal "shows they are still not listening to their frontline health-care workers," Dr. Noa Nessim, a third-year resident, told the *Riverdale Press*. Montefiore has four hospitals and more than 15 outpatient care centers in the Bronx. Meanwhile, 800 nurses at Mount Sinai South Nassau Hospital in Oceanside filed for an election Nov. 22, seeking to join the New York State Nurses Association

NEW JERSEY FARMWORKERS WIN CARD CHECK

Workers at Bowery Farming in New Jersey won a union Nov. 15 when the state Board of Mediation ruled that agricultural workers have the right under state law to gain collective-bargaining rights through card check. The board ordered the company to recognize the Bowery Farming Union, part of United Food and Commercial Workers Local 888, as representing workers at its indoor-cultivation facility in Kearny. "We're so excited to be the first to use this law since 1986 and pave the way for ALL New Jersey agricultural workers to have the chance to start a union," the union exulted on Twitter. The company, the largest "vertical farming" company in the U.S., advertises itself as the future of sustainable agriculture, growing herbs and vegetables in urban areas without pesticides — but according to the union, it had fired five union supporters by Oct. 21.

COURTESY

NATIONAL LABOR BRIEFS

BY INDYPENDENT STAFF

LABOR IN THE SOUTH: *Members of the Union of Southern Service Workers celebrate the launch of their organization.*

GOVERNMENT IMPOSES CONTRACT RAILROAD WORKERS REJECTED

President Joseph Biden told 115,000 freight-rail workers "Let's Go, Brandon" on Dec. 2, when he signed a bill imposing a contract that had been rejected by four of their 12 unions. The deal leaves the workers with no paid sick days and mercilessly tight scheduling. Biden said he was "reluctant to override" a union vote, but had asked Congress to intervene to avert "a potentially crippling national rail shutdown" on Dec. 9. Giving the workers seven paid sick days a year was put into a separate bill, which the House narrowly passed, but 42 Republicans plus Joseph Manchin sustained a Senate filibuster. The lack of paid sick days symbolized the "Precision Scheduled Railroading" system, in which the main seven freight lines have reduced their workforces by 30% over the last five years, leaving so little slack that workers have to be on call 90% of the time. "Our members are forced to work more hours, have less stability, suffer more stress, and receive less rest," the SMART-TD union said Dec. 1. "No American worker should ever have to face the decision of going to work sick, fatigued, or mentally unwell versus getting disciplined or being fired by their employer, yet that is exactly what is happening every single day on this nation's largest freight railroads."

UAW REFORM GROUP SCORES BIG IN UNION'S FIRST DIRECT ELECTION

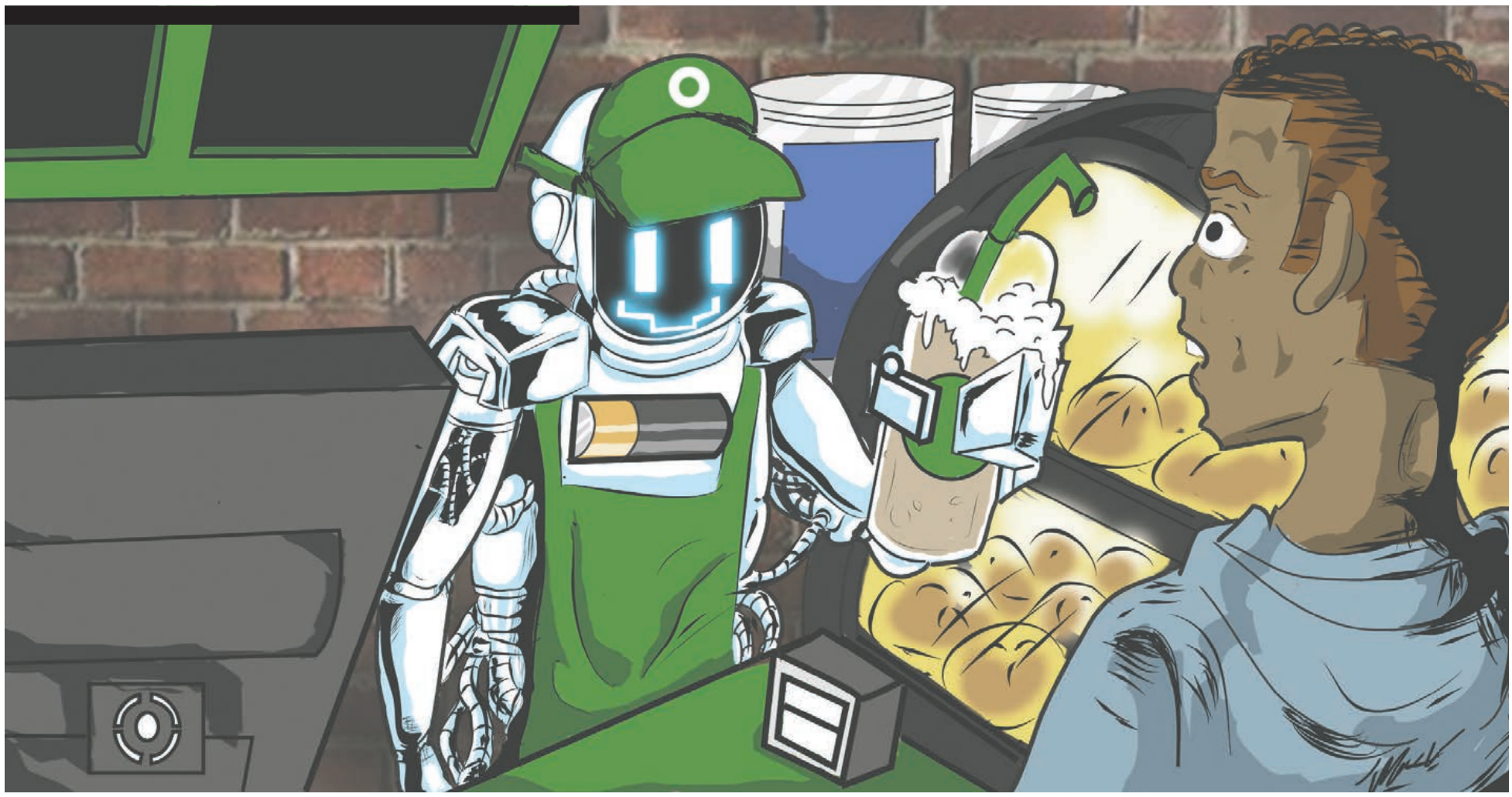
In the United Auto Workers' first-ever direct election of national leaders, the Members United reform slate took incumbent President Ray Curry to a runoff and won the union's second-highest post. Members United presidential candidate Shawn Fain placed second in a five-candidate field with 37.6% of the vote, while Margaret Mock was elected secretary-treasurer with 62%. The runoff vote will be in January and February. Members United also won two of the three vice-presidential slots and two of the nine races for regional director, with a third going to a runoff and anti-incumbent Dave Green elected in the Ohio-Indiana region. UAW members voted to begin direct elections last year, after corruption scandals got two former presidents convicted on federal felony charges. Contracts in which newer workers are paid less also spawned discontent. The UAW leadership, Mock told *Labor Notes*, "still has remnants or the smell of corruption. They're still saying to the local leadership, 'find out what management wants and then give it to them.'"

SOUTHERN SERVICE WORKERS' UNION LAUNCHED

About 150 people gathered in Columbia, South Carolina, Nov. 17–19 to launch a union for Southerners in low-wage service jobs like home health care, retail, restaurants, fast food and warehouses. The Union of Southern Service Workers plans to fight racism and rely on direct action rather than the National Labor Relations Board election process. "We will organize walkouts, sit-ins, and boycotts," South Carolina restaurant worker Naomi Harris told *Capital & Main*. "We will take legal action against wage theft, because you're not about to pay me less than I deserve." Many of the union's founders are veterans of Raise Up, the Service Employees International Union-affiliated campaign to raise wages and win workers' rights in the South, the country's least-unionized region.

THREE AIRLINE UNIONS JOIN TO ORGANIZE DELTA WORKERS

Three major airline unions announced Nov. 21 that they would collaborate on a coordinated campaign to help organize workers at Delta Air Lines, the least unionized of the three largest U.S. carriers. The Association of Flight Attendants-CWA will work with flight attendants, the International Association of Machinists with fleet-service workers, and the Teamsters with mechanics. Delta is the only U.S.-based mainline carrier where those workers are not unionized, the three unions said, and only 20% of its workers overall are represented by a union. Flight attendants have begun officially collecting union cards, said AFA President Sara Nelson.



TYRONE WALLACE

AUTOMATION NATION

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE WILL REMAKE THE ECONOMY OVER THE NEXT DECADE. WHO WILL REAP THE BENEFITS?

By Amba Gueguerian

Job automation will sweep through the economy at an unprecedented pace in the coming decade.

Will this surge in automation cast tens of millions of fired workers into a newly impoverished underclass? Can enough new jobs be created so we at least muddle through?

Will strong insurgent unions ensure that the economic benefits of increased productivity are broadly shared? Or, to push the envelope even farther, what if the means of production were put under public control and the economy was organized around meeting human needs?

The extent to which we as workers organize ourselves to defend our rights will go a long way in shaping that future.

A 2019 Brookings Institute report projected that 52 million U.S. jobs would be affected by algorithms by 2030. In 2021, global consulting firm McKinsey & Company predicted that 45 million jobs will be lost to algorithms and androids by 2030.

A 2022 analysis by Finance Online reports that 43% of employers are set on cutting down their workforces to make way for advanced technology. The group says that U.S. workers between the ages of 18 to 34 are the most affected by job displacement from automation, that by the late 2020s, nearly 25% of women workers are at risk of being displaced compared to more than 15% of men and that highly-educated people have more opportunities to work in sectors where they are less likely to be displaced due to technology integration.

We've already seen automation firsthand. Think self-checkout at the grocery store or McDonalds, or being forced to interact with automated customer-service phone lines and chatbots. Workers at Amazon, Tesla and other Big Tech companies have experienced "cobots" — large robots that work "with" them to get the job done. This often leads to additional work stress, from the knowledge that more technology at the workplace means worker surveillance — the "digital whip" — to the fact that robots are often not programmed to properly understand the pace of the human they're working with and break frequently, leading to unsafe working conditions in the name of "productivity."

Consider this testimony from Thometra Robinson, a worker at an Amazon warehouse in Stone Mountain, Georgia:

> *You want us to perform our job with ineffective, inadequate equipment. People are hurt. I got pictures of piss in bottles and cups. … You gotta tape up your monitor that literally just hangs there, is barely lit up. The scanner, God, Lord, you're playing with that all day. The belt is always breaking. Mind you, you have to pack a box in 37 seconds, which is just unrealistic. All the training they tell you to do, they don't tell the computer that. So the computer doesn't know you gotta do all these little steps. If you're missing an item, you need to go look for it. You gotta get all the way down on your knees. And there are techniques and protocols that they add. … You add on this extra shit but you still gotta do it in 37 seconds. … You can't be safe and productive. It ain't gonna happen. … You have to stock your station; there's not enough water spiders. But the computer doesn't know you have to get your own stuff. They just know that you have to pack your box in 37 seconds.*

Automation is a recurring feature of capitalism as bosses seek to exponentially increase productivity while reducing the percentage of their revenues they pay out as wages. At the same time, new industries and new jobs are created and unemployment rates remain relatively stable over time, though the process of change can be wrenching for some communities.

With the development of Artificial Intelligence (AI) — computer systems that are able to perform tasks that normally require human intelligence — technology-induced mass unemployment is more likely than in the past. AI technology is being developed to drive cars, clean schools, perform surgery, write articles, compose songs, create digital art and beyond. Some (very rich) people are using AI to digitally preserve their consciousness so that replicas of themselves can be created in the future, perhaps when humans have migrated to other planets.

Studies suggest that workers who have specialized training or post-high-school education and those that are younger are most likely to find new work once displaced by AI; others fall into poverty. Job automation has already added to labor-market inequality since at least the 1980s.

This brings to mind dark, *Ready Player One*-esque images of unemployed masses living in giant, walled-off ghettos. Or, a utopian alternative: A world in which people spend less time working grueling, menial jobs and more time on fulfilling work and leisure, and in which all of our basic needs are met. (In both worlds, AI outsmarts its programmers, gaining some level of sentience and could, in theory, organize against the boss.)

Harry Holzer, an economics professor at Georgetown University who studies the subject, projects that a greater dependence on AI will occur but that the shift will be gradual. As companies transition to using more robot technology, new jobs will be created to respond to a rising demand from consumers who can now afford cheaper products (prices will drop due to employers' lower production costs).

"The people hurt are not just the people directly displaced by the technology. It's also the people who in some sense have to compete with the technology or with globalization," Holzer told *The Indypendent*. "There are ways in which people can adjust. When technology is implemented, it does some of the tasks that workers have done, not necessarily all the tasks. Now, workers who only did one task on the job — you know, on an assembly line, they tighten some bolts as the car is passing — robots are gonna replace them. But if they have multiple tasks, and the automation does some but not all, there's a judgment call on the employer's part: Should he hold on to that worker and train them to do a new task?"

It is unlikely that new jobs will be created at the same rate that old ones are lost, or that enough new jobs will ever be created. And no matter what happens, massive layoffs will occur.

"Going forward, what makes all this more uncertain is that AI seems to have a much wider range of capabilities, even if it doesn't exist today," says Holzer.

HATERS

Continued from page 9

queens wanting to read to children, in Oregon, Texas and Tennessee. They are going to kill a drag queen or inspire a lone wolf to do it, "for the children" and some of those kids will be caught in the spray of bullets.

FIRST THEY CAME FOR THE DRAG QUEENS

The same far-right forces that terrorize LGBTQ Americans, bully local school boards and librarians and show up with guns outside early voting drop boxes and at neo-Nazi rallies. The demonization of gays, to the point of hallucinating that they are threatening children, is a feature of far-right ideology; it allows them to mainstream violence while casting themselves as vigilante defenders of "Real America".

But the absurdity of the conservative obsession with pedophiles and groomers is it ignores the real danger children face. Especially gay children. And it comes from them – straight right wingers.

In a report "Missed Opportunities: LGTBQ Youth Homelessness", from the University of Chicago, we see a nightmare America, where among the 4.2 million youth that go in and out of homelessness in a year, roughly 400,000 are LGTBQ. They run from home because of school bullying whether online or in real life. They run from homophobic parents, especially if they are Black, especially if they are Latino and poor. They climb into the back seats of cars and trade sex for food. They sleep in abandoned buildings. They use drugs to numb pain and wake up trying to wash off the handprints. They make families in the street to replace the ones they fled, and it sometimes works, briefly, like a miracle.

The real threat to American children is Conservative straight people. They are chasing after the destroyers of children. If they look in the mirror, they'll find them.

ALU NEWSPAPER

Continued from page 10

ish alongside the labor movements According to the Labor Press Project at the University of Washington, "between 1880-1940, thousands of labor and radical publications circulated, constituting a golden age for working-class newspapers." These papers existed in the many languages spoken by immigrant workers.

During the Red Scare of the late 1940s and early 1950s, the labor press was attacked. "There were literally laws passed that prohibited the publications of those entities deemed subversive or radical," Gilpin said.

This caused a major decline in the radical labor press. Then, as union membership shrunk from the 1970s onward, union newspapers became less common while major commercial newspapers dropped their labor beat reporters even as their pages swelled with business coverage. Many left publications, including *The Indypendent*, continued to carry the torch for labor coverage in the 2000s and 2010s. In the past several years, major news outlets slowly have gravitated back to doing more union coverage amid the labor turmoil sparked by the pandemic. But, there's still a large void to fill.

"You need to have constant communication to combat the inherent advantage that employers have," says Gilpin. "We can't count on mainstream media to cover those issues of interest to working people."

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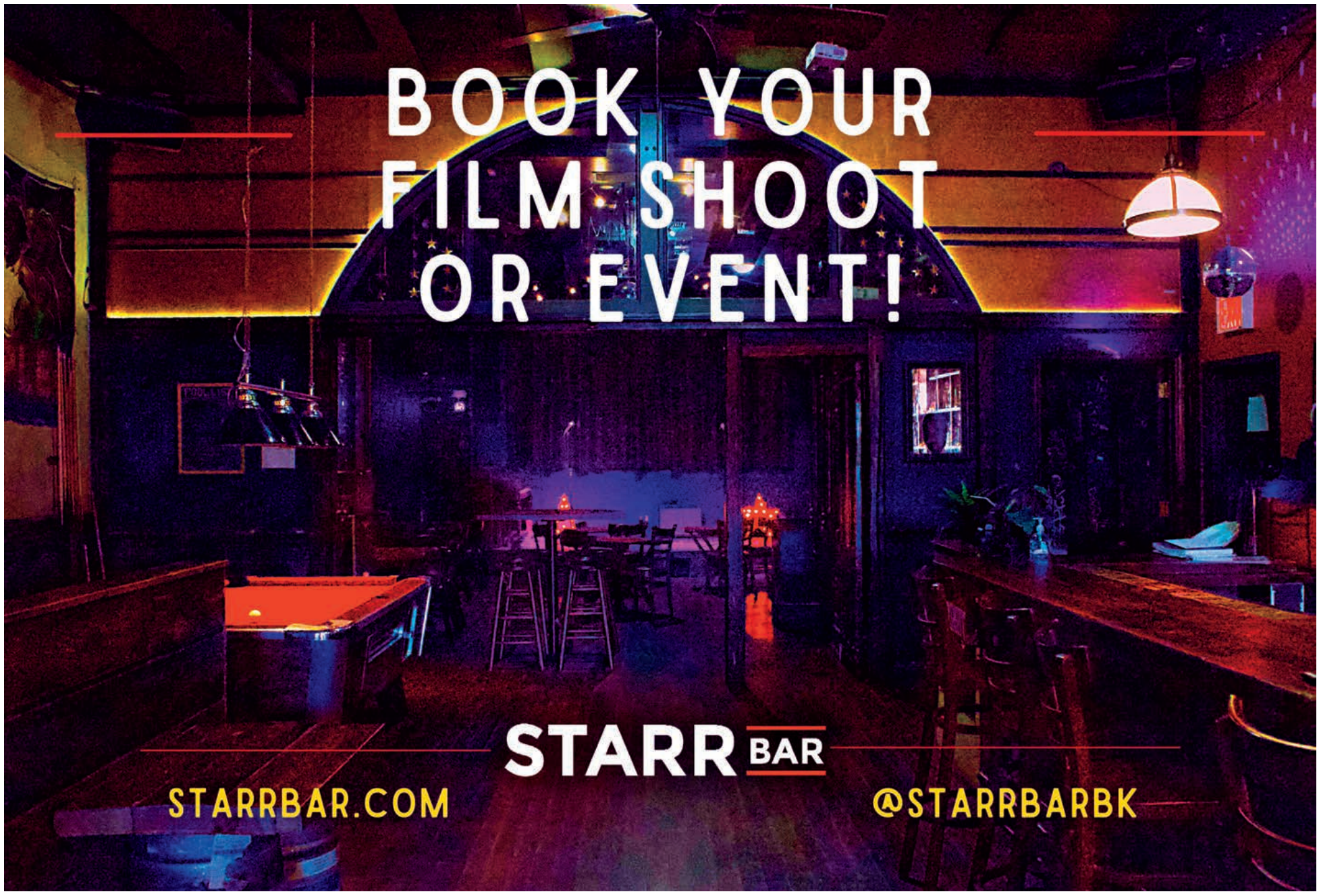
Cassio Mendoza says the commercial media's coverage of the ALU has failed to grasp the conditions workers face how unions work. "There's certain things you wouldn't know to report about unless you worked in the building," he said.

The writers at The Associate, full-time workers at JFK8, hope to articulate what's happening within the warehouse and the ALU in a way that attracts workers who are not currently union members.

"People don't really understand the value of the union if they don't understand what is possible and what other workers have done in other places to secure much better working conditions and pay," Mendoza said. "Political education is a way of opening people's eyes to what is possible, so that they'll feel more of a commitment to help build the union."



FIGHTING THE MAN AT 30,000 FEET, & WINNING

The Great Stewardess Rebellion: How Women Launched a Workplace Revolution at 30,000 Feet
BY NELL MCSHANE WULFHART
DOUBLEDAY, 2022

By Jessica Max Stein

"It wouldn't be much of an exaggeration to say that in the 1960s, the airplane cabin was the most sexist workplace in America," declares Nell McShane Wulfhart in *The Great Stewardess Rebellion: How Women Launched a Workplace Revolution at 30,000 Feet*. Nor does this seem like much of an exaggeration, given the grim picture Wulfhart initially paints. Stewardesses were fired upon marriage, pregnancy, or when reaching a certain age (32 on some airlines, 35 on others). These restrictions limited their tenure, making it nearly impossible to organize. Yet organize they did, in tandem with civil-rights laws and the women's movement, changing their working conditions almost unimaginably. Their story is a delightful underdog saga and a vivid snapshot of the heyday of flying, in the era before deregulation.

Wulfhart tells this story largely through two flight attendants and organizers: Patricia "Patt" Gibbs and Tommie Hutto. She refers to the women by their first names throughout, a little chummy.

Gibbs joins American Airlines in 1962 at age 20, her story illustrating the decade's circumstances and changes. Indicative of the job's strict appearance standards, Gibbs is required to close the gap between her front teeth. This agonizing dental procedure has one silver lining: It helps her adhere to the airline's stringent weight standards (which, notably, did not apply to male stewards). "Her mouth was always in pain, but she comforted herself with the fact that the pain meant she ate less." The book is studded with little jewels like this, evoking an era.

The injustices pile up. Stewardesses are required to wear heels (despite being on their feet for hours at a stretch) and girdles, subjected to "girdle checks" (read: gropings). Their pay is docked for things like removing hats or gloves while in uniform, even if not on duty. Gibbs gets docked for riding a motorcycle to work, considered "conduct unbecoming to an American Airlines stewardess." She is repeatedly fired for similar tiny infractions, especially after she becomes active in the union, and has to file grievances to get reinstated, often without back pay. The Air Line Stewards and Stewardesses Association (ALSSA) isn't taken seriously by its parent union, the much larger and male-dominated Transport Workers Union (TWU). The TWU sees the stewardesses as merely transient workers, not realizing this is built into the injustices of the job. (This doesn't change after ALSSA breaks up in the early 1970s, with each airline having its own local chapter in the TWU.)

The stewardesses find help in the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and in the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, which enforces it. By the early '70s, the marriage and age restrictions are largely lifted — and men start joining in. Brian Hagerty, a gay steward, provides a male perspective, in keeping with the book's engagingly vivid portraits. The presence of men gets rid of some of the oppressive rules for women: heels, nail polish, makeup. Gibbs files a grievance against girdles: If it's so important to rein everything in, "why don't the men wear jockstraps?" She wins.

Still, things are pretty bad for the stewardesses. Tommie Hutto joins American Airlines in 1970 at age 23, and is routinely accosted by men masturbating in their cars as she walks to work at LaGuardia. Uniforms become increasingly humiliating. TWA stewardesses have to wear flimsy paper dresses, other airlines require micro-miniskirts or hot pants and go-go boots. Ads sexualizing stewardesses only worsen this atmosphere. "I'm Cheryl. Fly me," announces National. "We really move our tails for you," claims Continental. The ads lead to "leering, groping and heavy-handed flirting" on the planes. Some airlines even require the stewardesses to kiss the passengers as they deplane. Again, Wulfhart has an eagle eye for memorable, telling details like this.

Hutto takes refuge in Stewardesses for Women's Rights (SFWR), which grows from a tiny meeting in a Greenwich Village church basement (with Gloria Steinem in attendance) to a national organization with an office at 30 Rockefeller Plaza and branches all over the country. SFWR enacts some changes, getting the Federal Aviation Administration to restrict transporting hazardous materials on planes, and puts out its own commercial reminding the public that stewardesses are there for safety, not for sex.

Still, if anything, the productivity of SFWR highlights the uselessness of the TWU. The American Airlines stewardesses move to form their own union, the Association of Professional Flight Attendants (APFA). Wulfhart dramatizes this a little cornily: Gibbs sneaking off to LA for a "secret meeting," the women frantically trying to get everyone to sign authorization-to-act cards that will trigger a vote to form the union, breathlessly counting up the votes and, predictably, forming the APFA.

The narrative pits Gibbs and Hutto against each other. Gibbs wants to start a new union and Hutto, by now president of a TWU-affiliated union local, wants to work within the system. Wulfhart contrasts their different styles, exaggerating the characterizations for dramatic effect. Gibbs is the brazen, combative lesbian; Tommie, the more diplomatic married chick. Yet once the APFA is formed, Patt becomes the new president, and Tommie becomes the vice president, the two women often working together to negotiate arbitration, voicing nothing but mutual respect. The reader is left to wonder why the story pitted its two main characters against each other.

JIM SECULA

The book could also do a better job with minorities within this minority. There's a short section on stewardesses of color (3% of all stewardesses in 1972), but then it returns to the all-white narrative. And while the book follows Gibbs' journey out of the closet, it doesn't particularly apply this to her experiences as a flight attendant and organizer. Though flight attendants could be fired for being gay, the book only mentions this in the context of the gay male flight attendant.

The APFA serves the women powerfully for just a few years before deregulation pummels the industry. Lots of airlines fold, many flight attendants lose their jobs and those that remain struggle to hold on to benefits and protections. Some weight rules are relaxed in the early 1990s, but the issue is never quite resolved despite being emphasized throughout the book.

Still, the women wrought many changes. What's more, they set a precedent of activism that influenced later generations of flight attendants such as Sara Nelson, the International President of the Association of Flight Attendants-CWA, which represents nearly 50,000 flight attendants at 19 airlines. Indeed, the book ends with her words when she called for a general strike during the government shutdown of 2019: "Strike, strike, strike, strike, strike," she said. "Say it — it feels good."

REMEMBERING THE SIXTIES GENERATION

A SON EXPLORES THE MEANING OF HIS MOTHER'S LIFE

By Nicholas Powers

"Let's go to the protest." My aunt rolled her eyes. "That's what your mom said. I told her no. She got arrested and spent a night in the Tombs. When I tell you, the next day she was happy as a baby, like it was her birthday. God, I wanted to slap her."

I laughed.

"She always searched for something." Mixed feelings passed over her face like a cloud shadow.

"That was mom," I sighed.

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My mother died a year ago. I flew to Florida to see my aunt and hear stories I wasn't told but wanted to know. We stood at the photo wall; I touched the images like puzzle pieces that if connected properly could give me the meaning of her life. Here is a brown girl with moody eyes. Here, she is young and beautiful. Raven black hair. Cheeks like two muffins. Here, she sports an afro, proud and defiant.

Going from photo to photo, I could see her transformation. She was born in 1948, in a Puerto Rican Brooklyn enclave and turned 20 in 1968, the peak of anti-Vietnam War protests, the hippie movement, the Young Lords and Black Panther rebellions. All the marches and slogans scooped my mother like a giant wave and lifted her out of the neighborhood, out of the family, and flung her into America.

The last photo of her life was in my phone; onscreen, I held her hand after she slipped into a coma at Staten Island Hospital. When I pressed it to the wall, a jolt hit me. Many of her generation are dying. Friends and mentors are in wheelchairs or nursing homes. Celebrities from that era like Muhammad Ali and Sidney Poitier show up in *New York Times* obituaries. Each death means the living memory of those years is lost. At some point, the last person who danced at Woodstock or threw rocks at the Days of Rage in Chicago will close their eyes forever and we won't be able to see our past through them. And I need it, now, maybe more than ever.

I took the phone down and said, "Love. Love. Love." It was the chorus from her favorite Beatles song. She sang it to me when I was a teen wracked with doubt about my place in the world. Here I was again, decades later and a thousand miles from home, staring at her photos and filled with the same questions.

• • •

"You went to Woodstock?" I asked my mother during one of our long car rides in upstate New York.

"Oh yeah," she nodded. "If I tell you, don't judge me. Pinky swear?"

We knotted pinky fingers and she launched into her off-Broadway actress mode, real Tony award-winning stuff. Her face flowed from her younger self to her suave boyfriend at that time to the small town yokels she met en route to the concert to the famous musicians she met backstage.

"I was dating a Black guy from the West Village; very hip, wore a cowboy hat, had his own jeep." She drummed her fingers on the steering wheel. "He drove us to Woodstock and as you probably read, the roads were jammed, so we walked to the event, got separated in the crowd. For the next three days, strangers befriended me — me — this petite Puerto Rican woman. They fed me, let me sleep in tents and vans, gave me LSD and I danced in the mud, in the rain, made my way backstage and smoked with musicians. It was the first time in my life I felt safe and loved, and it was by people I'd never met."

A light radiated from her face. There it was. The '60s, whatever it had been, whoever talked about it, they glowed.

"You have to understand, Nicky." Her face tightened. "We believed we could change the world." She snapped out of the spell. "Anyway, at the end, I wandered around and guess who I met — my boyfriend! Not angry at all. Hell, he had a great time. Even threw his cowboy hat from the car and yelled he was so happy. He was chivalrous, made sure I got home safe."

"Oh hell, why couldn't he have been my dad?"

"I tried." She winked, salaciously. "Oh, believe me I tried."

• • •

What my mother searched for in the '60s was herself. She could not find a reflection at home. Grandma saw a girl "too dark" to be her daughter. Grandpa didn't see her at all; he was old-school, cold and aloof. Which is why in the early birthday photo, I saw a girl filled with questions.

Between the photos are the stories she told. I remember when she grabbed my hand and spun me salsa-style. "We had these traditional dances. Boys in suits. Girls in dresses," she said. "I hung in the West Village with the bohemians. I'd be at a cafe and see Allen Ginsberg write poems and perform them." She theatrically fluffed her hair. "I came back to the dance in jeans and an afro. All my friends came up and gawked, asked what the hell did I do." She laughed. "In a month, they were all dressed the same way."

"We were serious, too," she nodded. "We started a storefront housing-rights workshop to help tenants against landlords. Marched all over the city. But you know, it got a little too serious. I held a rent party, everything groovy, everyone dancing and drinking and in comes a nationalist who bombed a bar filled with Wall Street types. Can I tell you, it's like the needle scratched on the record and time froze. Suddenly, everyone remembered they had kids and had to go home. He left too. But it was a wake-up call."

• • •

On the flight to New York, I scrolled through photos and saw my mother holding me as a baby. Maybe it was being on a plane, but I remembered when we played, I climbed her feet and she pushed me up. "Fly," she said, "Be free!" And I spread my arms in a crazy, jerky way to keep balance before falling on the bed. We laughed so loud.

By the time she gave birth to me, 1968 was in the rearview mirror. Mom took the experience of free love and

ESTEBAN JIMENEZ

broke with how kids were raised in our family. In her day, children were "seen, not heard." Very old school. But she poured love into me like a cup filling over. We chased each other with water guns around the living room. She sang and danced. After work, we slept in front of the TV as the national anthem played; the screen became a small static snowstorm in a dark apartment. She talked to me. She listened. Her arms wrapped me like an inner tube. We were best friends.

Long before I learned about the '60s, I felt it in her shameless joy. In the photo, she held me like a favorite album, proud and giddy. And I saw on my toddler face that glow.

• • •

"I LOVE YOUR SON more than you do." She pointed her finger like a knife.

"Mom!"

"Yes, that's what I told him," she said. "His boy has difficulties, probably on the spectrum and the father calls him dumb and a waste of time." Her eyes squinted. "The thing is the kid's smart, he just takes information in differently. If the dad gave him half a chance."

Mom was re-enacting the parent-teacher conference where a man insulted his kid, one she taught and hugged, right in front of everyone. She went to law school and could've been a corporate attorney making shitloads of money. Instead, she taught middle-school in Queens. Mostly immigrant kids, like she was decades ago. On house visits, she saw families too poor to afford a two-bedroom sleeping in beds in shifts. She never stopped serving the people. What the '60s taught her is that the world needs caring and lesson plans more than fame or wealth.

"Anyway, fuck him." She patted my knee. "I'm proud of you. I'm proud that you teach, too."

• • •

IN NEW YORK, walking past the rubble of the Twin Towers, reading how the president vowed revenge, I realized I did not just hear my mother's stories, I was reliving them. She had gone to Borough Manhattan Community College. I taught there. She once had an afro. Now, I had dreadlocks. She protested the Vietnam War. I protested the Iraq War.

Rivers of people carrying signs flowed into New York. Whatever one's ideology, we knew the pain and loss and terror of 9/11 would stay with us forever and did not want anyone else to suffer what we suffered. And the U.S. military was preparing to rain bombs on Iraq, each one a mini 9/11, each one a new crime to avenge this crime.

"Be careful Nicky." She patted my shoulder. "I know you're going to protest. They're better at surveillance now. And don't assume everyone is a friend. They hire people of color to infiltrate leftist groups. That's how they got us."

I nodded absentmindedly and ran into the street, then turned back. She could not come. We walked and talked together for so many years. I didn't notice that she had slowed down until just then, when she looked at me with a mix of pride and fear.

• • •

ALL THE MARCHES AND SLOGANS, SCOOPED MY MOTHER LIKE A GIANT WAVE AND LIFTED HER OUT OF THE NEIGHBORHOOD, OUT OF THE FAMILY AND FLUNG HER INTO AMERICA.

WHEN THE COVID LOCKDOWNS were lifted, she came to visit her grandson but couldn't make it up the stairs. Huffing and barely balancing on a cane, she called for him. I ran down, annoyed that she strained herself. "Mom," I said, "Mom, c'mon." I got her back into her car and brought my son to play with her. I went to the bodega, came back and she sang Beatles songs to him.

• • •

FOUR A.M., the hospital called. "She passed out during dialysis," the doctor said. "She choked on her saliva for 10 minutes. She's in a coma. She may be brain dead. Do you want us to revive her?"

"YES!" I screamed at them. I screamed while driving across the Verrazzano Bridge. I screamed into my hands when I saw her, a breathing tube taped to her mouth. I drove to the beach at high tide and screamed her name.

• • •

IN THE LAST SECONDS of her life, I held her hand as the nurse removed the breathing tube. The heart monitor beeped frantically as the heart rate plummeted. She turned it off, which was kindness. I cradled my mother's head, kissed her face. She turned to me, wrenching a last second of awareness to see me. "Love. Love. Love," I sang to her.

EPILOGUE

I met my friends at the march. The Supreme Court had stripped the right to an abortion, and we flooded the streets in protest. When I saw them, we hugged and hoisted signs above our heads. The sun was a low, bright star between the buildings. It seemed to guide us forward. I knew if my mother was alive and younger, she would have been here because she was in the marches to legalize abortion.

She is gone. Physically. The principles she fought for, they remain. Which is why, I can say here, on this page, where imagination makes anything possible, that yes, she is alive and holding a fist in air. Looking over my shoulder, I see today's march has grown beyond one day or one cause or one time. Near us walks Betty Friedan and not far off is Pedro Alibizu Campos, Frederick Douglass and Ella Baker. They are lost in the endless sea of faces that form one long endless march. On each face is the same expression of people determined to protect their dignity.

Some pray. Some carry guns. I see my mother and she sees me. We hold hands. We keep going.

ROB LAQUINTA

WHILE MY QATAR GENTLY WEEPS

By Steven Wishnia

Qatar is far from the worst government ever to host a World Cup.

Yes, the oil-rich Persian Gulf state has abysmal labor conditions and harshly homophobic laws. More than two-thirds of the country's 2.9 million residents are migrant workers, mostly from South Asia. An investigation by the British *Guardian* newspaper in 2021, probably the most in-depth done so far, estimated that more than 6,500 migrant workers from India, Pakistan, Nepal, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka had died in Qatar since 2010, when it was awarded the 2022 Cup.

The investigation was only able to link 37 deaths directly to construction of the seven new stadiums, but said that many fatal accidents were misclassified as "non-work related," and other deaths came from laboring in the extreme heat, lack of medical care or dangerous housing conditions.

Qatar abolished the "kafala" system, which locked migrant workers into indentured servitude (they could be deported if they didn't have a job, and employers could hold their passports) in 2020, but some of its practices continue; the revised law does not cover domestic workers. The new minimum wage, set in 2021, is about US$275 a month, with an allowance of about $220 for food and housing. The country's per-capita gross domestic product is above $61,000, the highest in the world.

But is Qatar worse than Vladimir Putin's Russia, the billionaire-oligarchy dictatorship that hosted the 2018 Cup? It hasn't invaded any adjacent countries, bombed hospitals or massacred villagers. The Qatari government persuaded FIFA, the Federation of International Football Associations, to threaten to give yellow cards to players who wore rainbow armbands, but the Putin regime's religious-nationalist hatred of gays and lesbians is as bad or worse. (That the sports world is acting on this is progress, given male jock culture's traditional homophobia — Major League Baseball teams holding "Pride Night" promotions would have previously been unthinkable.)

Qatar is definitely not worse than the Argentine military dictatorship of 1978, which "disappeared" an estimated 30,000 political opponents, including many who were dropped out of helicopters into the River Plate estuary (a practice now celebrated on American-fascist T-shirts, although wrongly attributed to Chile's Augusto Pinochet). The Buenos Aires stadium where Argentina won the 1978 final was about a 15-minute bus ride from the Navy School of Mechanics, the junta's torture chamber.

The 1934 Cup was held in fascist Italy, a regime that gained power through organized thuggery, abolished elections and built stadiums that featured giant busts of dictator Benito Mussolini. The final, which Italy won, was held at the National Fascist Party Stadium in Rome. Within two years, the regime would invade Ethiopia; within a decade, it would help the Nazis ship thousands of Italian Jews to Auschwitz.

The worst venue for a World Cup-related game, however, was in November 1973, for a playoff between Chile and the Soviet Union for a spot in the 1974 Cup: the National Stadium in Santiago. Chile's new military dictatorship had just washed the bloodstains from the ground's most recent use as a concentration camp for more than 6,000 people seized after Pinochet's coup that September. The Soviets refused to play in a "place of tortures and executions," so the Chilean team took the field unopposed, kicked the ball into an empty net, and were declared victors.

FIFA's inspectors a few weeks before had noted that there were no "detainees" on the pitch or in the seats, and that the grass was "in perfect condition."

Several other countries could have suited FIFA's intent to hold the World Cup in North Africa or the Middle East. Egypt has the most solid professional league in Africa and one of the world's best players in Mohammed Salah. Morocco, Algeria, and Tunisia also have long-established leagues and qualified for the Cup several times.

Saudi Arabia or Iran would have been politically problematic, but they too have Cup history and strong fan cultures. Qatar, although its national team won the Asian championship in 2019, had to import Lebanese fans to cosplay enthusiastic supporters.

There have been numerous reports that Qatar bribed its way into getting the Cup. They might well be true, as FIFA has a long history of corruption, but another reason was just the ordinary power of money. Qatar was rich enough to build infrastructure that would appeal to the plutocrats in the luxury boxes, glitzy like a Swarovski-crystal sculpture of a giant soccer ball. Those people would likely not enjoy experiencing Moroccan culture by riding in a crammed Mercedes Grand Taxi.

Morocco wound up being the Cup's surprise success, becoming the first team ever from Africa or the Muslim world to reach the semifinals. With only a few players from the world's top clubs, it relied on teamwork, a taut defense, adept use of space and goalkeeper Yassine "Bono" Bounou's penalty-saving acumen. It upset Belgium, Spain and Portugal without conceding a goal before going out to defending champions France, 2-0.

THE WORLD CUP'S 33RD TEAM

Palestine didn't qualify for this year's World Cup, but its presence was felt in the world's most-watched sporting event.

Fans who traveled to Qatar, the first Middle Eastern or African country to host the 32-team tournament, wore Palestinian keffiyeh headdresses; broke into performances of the dabke, a traditional Palestinian dance; and chanted "Free Palestine!" at matches and in the streets.

Flag-waving and chants interrupted a number of matches at the 48th minute in remembrance of 1948 Nakba (or "catastrophe"), in which the founding of the state of Israel was accompanied by an ethnic cleansing campaign by Zionist paramilitaries that drove two-thirds of the Palestinian population off their historic lands.

"Free Palestine" posters were unfurled in the stands. When a Tunisian fan ran onto the field during the second half of a game between Tunisia and France, which Tunisia won, supporters chanted "Palestine, Palestine!" as the man was dragged away.

After Morocco upset Spain to reach the quarterfinals, the Moroccan team huddled around a Palestinian flag. Speaking to the Middle East Eye, Tareq Sawalmeh, a Palestinian-Moroccan teacher whose father grew up in a refugee camp in the occupied West Bank, said. "Moroccans have made us Palestinians nothing but proud during the World Cup."

– AMBA GUERGUERIAN
#FREEPALESTINE

REVEREND BILLY'S REVELATIONS

Friends, I don't have my regular advice column to share with you this month. We are mourning two friends of mine who passed days apart, John Sims and Hamish Kilgour.

John Sims had a vision for the American South. Every one of his projects exploded the way things were. He took the sentimental anthem "I Wish I Was In Dixie Hooray Hooray" and brought it to a dozen different musical traditions, folk, blues, rock, gospel, calypso… The singers (of many races and backgrounds) sometimes were mocking at first, but then many rose to a complicated acceptance of the song while replacing its history with sorrow, anger and energy. The project is a master-stroke, ultimate critique combined with forgiveness. "I wish I was in the land of cotton…."

And then my Brooklyn neighbor Hamish Kilgour died. It feels like he is still walking, as he often did, up the road in front of our home into the cars coming one-way toward him. Hamish's radical vision was to be thoroughly himself in a completely predictable monoculture of early-80's rock.

Hamish and his brother David formed the New Zealand indie band "The Clean" and became a major influence from their indie-rock community at Flying Nun records. The Clean were punks with a reputation that went around the world without marketing, while Van Halen, Kansas, etc. floated through the culture like corporate aircraft carriers.

Their music was self-made with real-life stories, subtle as it was bombastic, and driven by Hamish's fierce drums. In the way of the punk revolution, they had an everyday appearance and the authority that comes from knowing who you are. For political anti-consumerists trying to break the trance of corporate culture, the punks were a key guide.

Each of my two friends leaves us freedoms that started out as their personal battles. John and Hamish had a brazenness in the face of big, old institutions. The Neo-confederacy and late power rock were both stagnant at this point, each of them macho and corrupt. But as we have seen, such money-driven boredom can help an original person focus on the mysterious things, which is the beginning of justice.

John and Hamish both got handed deaths at a young age. Their communicating to revolutionaries was sudden and fleeting. How do we sort out the teachers of original life from the thousands of celebrities, "the human products," unasked for models raining down on our heads? The heroes in media stories are such a constant barrage that we have to disengage from totalitarian consumerism as a conscious martial art and go to the likes of John Sims and Hamish Kilgour as a focused act of independence.

Then we have to create rituals of remembrance, to help each other keep the love and work real. They are gone now, and we face a thousand prefab memory events like Columbus Day, Thanksgiving and the St Patrick's Day Parade — often based on falsified histories. St. Christopher, St. Patrick and Thanksgiving (or is it Thankstaking?) only offer colonizing violence to celebrate — defeating the ocean, defeating the snakes, the mythologized beginnings of a centuries-long war to seize control of a continent. John and Hamish didn't control others with queens or gods — they invented a personal form of entertainment, generous to their audience, a kind of conversation.

And they were cultivators of friends. And we friends got the funky stuff too, the murmurs and rumors and sighs, their self-doubt. But that hemming and hawing was their compost of wild thoughts that they built into something radical.

And now they are dead and the whispers and sighs that friends allow one another, those little sounds that friends' share — gone. Just a 500-mile dark silent wind is there now. John and Hamish are telling us to feel the sorrow, go through the whole thing and lift the memory; we have free-use of their courage.

The two are spirits among us, as the preacher said. We will walk into our activism guided by these friends.

— REV BILLY

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WHY I GIVE TO THE INDY

Editor's Note: Jerry Meyer was a longtime supporter of* The Indypendent *before his death in November 2021. In this 2019 essay, he explained why he was such a staunch supporter of the* Indy *and why giving money to support left projects like this one was a source of so much joy to him — and why it should be for others as well. For more on Gerald Meyer, see bit.ly/3FFK4wJ.

By Jerry Meyer

I marvel at how *The Indy* is reaching into New York City's communities with an invaluable message: We must defend the gains we make and regain losses we experience.

I cheer every time I see how the newspaper's articles and features reach out beyond the confines of the already convinced. It demonstrates that change is not an all-or-nothing, now-or-never thing.

I learn what younger (much younger) New Yorkers, living in communities not reported about in *The New York Times*, are doing to change the status quo.

I value *The Indy's* Events Calendar, which informs its readers of expanding networks of progressive cultural and educational activities and provides the basis for genuine progressive communities.

I appreciate the high artistic level of *The Indy's* illustrative layout and background. Each issue of the paper is saying, "art matters."

I hope that *The Indy's* increased circulation will continue so that its hopeful and thoughtful message will reach ever more progressive people in need of a beacon.

I worry that *The Indy* might stagger and even fall due to a lack of support from its appreciative readers.

The left must be self-funding. We must all take responsibility for nurturing and growing its institutions, which are essential to our struggle for a fairer, more humane world. And it can be a source of great joy to do so.

I believe that others will join me in giving, in whatever amounts possible, to secure and strengthen *The Indypendent:* A free paper for free people.

Gerald Meyer (1940–2021) was a founding member of the Hostos Community College faculty, co-chair of the Vito Marcantonio Forum and author of Vito Marcantonio: Radical Politician (1902-1954) *and other writings. He was a lifelong activist.*

THE INDYPENDENT

THE INDYPENDENT is an absolutely unique voice in New York City — providing bold, original reporting and analysis of struggles for justice here and beyond.

In 2022, we continued publishing our print edition while expanding our online presence and hosted a weekly, one-hour prime-time radio show on WBAI. We look forward to continuing to do more great work in 2023. But, we need the support of our readers more than ever.

We took a beating during the worst of the pandemic but powered through, confident in the belief that our best work was still ahead of us. Now, with your help, we can provide more incisive coverage of more movements, print and distribute more papers, build a more dynamic online presence, and train more up-and-coming progressive journalists.

To keep THE INDY going strong, we need to raise $50,000 during our annual winter fund drive. If we don't reach our goal, we could falter just as a new year begins.

PLEASE GIVE TODAY.

Whether you can give $27, $50, $100, $500, $1,000 or more, it all helps.

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